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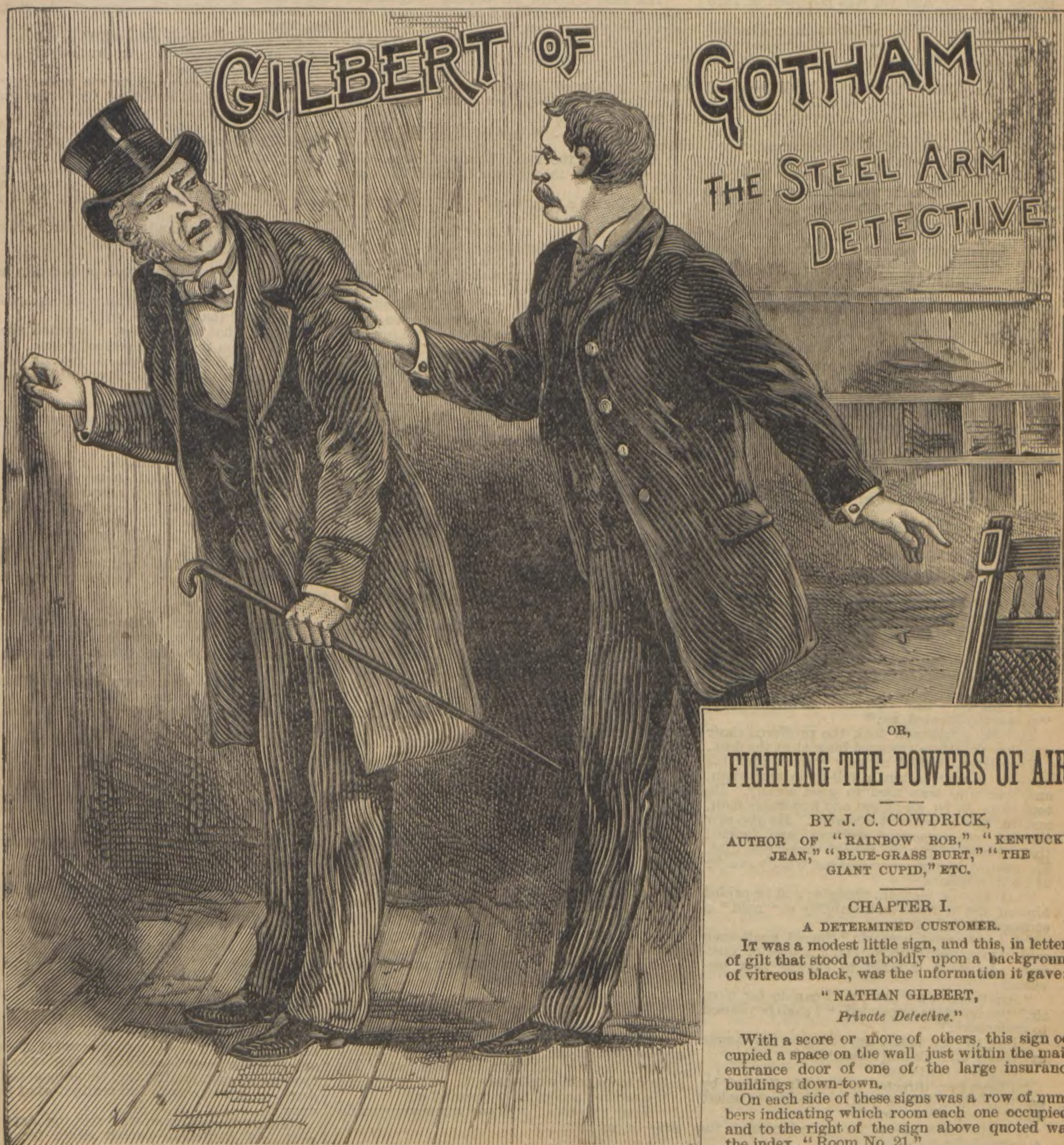
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OR,

FIGHTING THE POWERS OF AIR.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "RAINBOW ROB," "KENTUCKY
JEAN," "BLUE-GRASS BURT," "THE
GIANT CUPID," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DETERMINED CUSTOMER.

It was a modest little sign, and this, in letters of gilt that stood out boldly upon a background of vitreous black, was the information it gave:

"NATHAN GILBERT,
Private Detective."

With a score or more of others, this sign occupied a space on the wall just within the main entrance door of one of the large insurance buildings down-town.

On each side of these signs was a row of numbers indicating which room each one occupied, and to the right of the sign above quoted was the index, "Room No. 21."

Room No. 21 was on the third floor, and had two windows that looked out upon a cross-street

"WHO ARE YOU?" WAS THE INSTANT DEMAND OF THE MAGNETIZED OLD GENTLEMAN.
"WHY, I AM GILBERT, THE DETECTIVE; DON'T YOU KNOW ME?"

and commanded also a limited view of restless Broadway.

It was not a large office, but it was handsomely carpeted and well furnished, and its appearance was quite inviting.

A massive-looking table, on which were papers and books, occupied the center of the floor; a fine desk, or office table, stood near one of the windows; a book-case stood in one end of the apartment, and several large, wide-armed chairs were here and there.

The book-case mentioned, though few were aware of it, answered two purposes. Not only was it what it pretended to be, but it served as a door.

Seated at the desk near the window, tapping idly with a pencil as he looked out upon the busy street was a man.

And that man was Nathan Gilbert.

He was, as one might judge, about forty years of age, wore no beard, and his face had an expression of superior intelligence.

Had he been standing, his figure would have been found tall and well shaped. As it was, one could not help seeing at once that he was a man of perfect physical development.

He had a piercing glance, his eyes as bright as burnished steel, and it was seldom that an evil-doer could meet their steady gaze. His nose was well-cut, and his chin prominent, and these marks, taken with his steady eye and ample forehead, bespoke for him a strong mind and decided strength of will.

Indeed, he was a man strong of mind and strong of body, and yet was possessed of rare elegance of manners.

As a detective, Nathan Gilbert ranked second to none, and it not infrequently happened that younger men actively engaged in the profession came to him for advice.

He was widely known as "Gilbert of Gotham," and also—and especially with the lower class—as "The Steel Arm Detective."

And he was in all respects well fitted for the business he was engaged in. He was educated and refined, and was perfectly at home in the best circles of society; while, on the other hand, he could, in disguise, enter the haunts of the lowest criminals and appear as one of them. Having, however, a corps of capable assistants in his employ, both male and female, he found his time almost fully occupied in directing their movements, and was gradually drawing out of the active service himself.

While he was seated thus, tapping idly with his pencil and gazing down upon the street, an old gentleman entered the lower hall and paused to look at the array of signs.

This man was about sixty-five years of age, and to judge him by his appearance, rich. He was well-dressed, carried a heavy gold-headed cane, and in looking up at the signs he put a pair of gold-rimmed glasses to his eyes.

After a moment's search he said half aloud:

"Ah! here it is; 'Nathan Gilbert, Private Detective, Room No. 21.' I wonder whether I shall find him in?"

Removing his glasses he turned and entered the elevator, and was soon carried to the third floor.

A moment later the detective heard a knock at his door.

"Come in," he invited, as he roused up from his reverie and faced around.

The old gentleman entered.

The detective rose up at once and pulled one of the large chairs into a more inviting position with a bow and a "good-morning, sir," at the same time.

"Good-morning, sir," responded the old gentleman, as he closed the door; "is Mr. Gilbert, the detective, in?"

"I am he," the detective acknowledged; "please to be seated, sir."

The old gentleman took the proffered chair and the detective resumed his seat at the desk.

The detective had already "sized up" his visitor. He saw in him a well-to-do gentleman, and one who was used to good society. He took him to be an honest and honorable man, and in this he was not mistaken. He also saw that he was somewhat nervous, and fancied that he was acting as though under restraint. He seemed like one who was not wholly master of his own affairs.

So Gilbert of Gotham thought, and he prided himself not a little on his ability to "read" a stranger at short notice.

"I have called here, sir," the old gentleman said, "to consult with you on a matter of business. In short, I want to engage your services."

"Anything in my line that I can do for you, sir," the detective responded, "I shall be pleased to undertake."

"But, sir, the task I have for you may prove extremely difficult and hazardous."

"So much the better."

"I have been directed to you, Mr. Gilbert, by one who recommends you as one of the ablest detectives in New York."

A slight smile played for an instant upon the detective's lips.

"Some one must think well of my ability, certainly," he remarked. "May I inquire who it was directed you to me?"

"It was my friend, Mr. Burton Goldsmith."

"I know the gentleman."

"He says you once handled a little matter of business for him, and he speaks highly of you."

"Well, Mr.—"

"My name is Dillingsworth, sir—Edmund Dillingsworth."

"Well, Mr. Dillingsworth, what can I do for you? Please to state your case, and then I shall be able to judge for myself concerning it."

"Are we entirely alone, Mr. Gilbert?" the old gentleman asked, as he looked around the room.

"We are, as you can see," was the reply.

"And no one can overhear me?"

"Be assured on that point, sir; no one will overhear you."

"Then I will proceed. First, though, will you promise me one thing?"

"It will depend entirely upon what that 'one thing' is."

"It is this: If, after I have laid my case before you, you decline to take it up for me, will you keep secret what you shall have heard?"

"I will; unless by so doing I shall become a party to the concealing of a crime or some heinous wrong. I must caution you, Mr. Dillingsworth, that I take hold of no case except on the side of justice and right; and now, knowing this, it is for you to decide whether you will lay your case before me or not."

For a moment the old gentleman was silent and thoughtful.

"Then he said:

"The case I desire to place in your hands, concerns one of the greatest associations of rascals this city ever knew."

"Then, sir, unless you want them to come to grief, do not tell me any more."

"But I do want them to come to grief! I want them hunted down, forced to make restitution for the evil they have done! I want the wrong made right!"

"Then why do you not lay your case before the police?"

"Ah! there is the rub. I cannot prove what I assert, though in my own mind there is no doubt."

"That makes a difference."

"It does indeed."

"But why do you not go to the police, anyhow? They will investigate the matter, whatever it is, and it will cost you nothing."

"That, sir, is no inducement for me to turn to them. The police will not answer my purpose at all. I want one man, one able detective, to give his whole time and attention to the case, and I am able and willing to pay well for the service."

"Well, Mr. Dillingsworth, if I take the case, I will put a good man upon it who can give it his whole time and attention, and—"

"That will not do, Mr. Gilbert. I want you to take the case and give it your whole time and attention. I will make it an object for you to do so."

"But, Mr. Dillingsworth, it is very seldom that I take a case on those conditions. I have several cases on my hands at once, and have my assistants to look after constantly. That would mean the turning of my office over to one of my men, and trusting my whole business to him."

"And no doubt you have just such a man in your service, one whom you can trust fully."

"Yes, I have; but I had much rather give your case to him—"

"I will not hear to it! My friend directed me to you, and it is you I want."

"But Mr. Goldsmith's case was handled by my men, under my directions, Mr. Dillingsworth."

"I care nothing for that; I want you. As I said, I will make it an object to you, Mr. Gilbert, and—"

"As you will certainly have to do, sir."

"You may set your own figure."

"But I have not yet been told what the case is, sir. How long will it be likely to engage me?"

"Perhaps for months."

"Then I will not undertake it as you desire—personally—for less than three hundred dollars a month and my expenses. Allow me to put my men on it, and it will not cost you more than a third of that sum."

"I am willing to pay you the three hundred dollars a month and your expenses, Mr. Gilbert, and will pay you a month's salary in advance."

"You evidently mean business, and are determined to carry your point."

"I do and am."

"Well, if I take your case, then, it will be upon those conditions."

"That you are to give it your personal time and attention, for a salary of three hundred dollars a month and your expenses paid. The salary to be paid in advance."

"Exactly; according to your offer."

"Your expenses I will pay whenever you desire—or say monthly."

"I am satisfied, sir."

"Then," decided the old gentleman, as he produced a roll of bills, "consider yourself engaged. Here are three hundred dollars, and—"

"Hold on!" interrupted the detective, as he motioned the money away, "you have not yet stated the case, Mr. Dillingsworth, and I cannot promise you that I will take hold of it until I learn what it is. I reserve that privilege, always."

"Pardon me; I was getting ahead too fast. I will explain the situation at once."

CHAPTER II.

MR. DILLINGSWORTH'S STORY.

GILBERT OF GOTHAM settled back in his chair and prepared to give Mr. Dillingsworth his undivided attention.

"Before I begin, however," the old gentleman added, "let me ask you one question."

"Certainly."

"The question is this: Do you entertain any doubt as to my sanity?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"You believe me, then, to be sane?"

"I do."

"Have noticed nothing in my manner to indicate a derangement of intellect, eh?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Not even this strange question?"

"Your question is all right, sir. If there is anything wrong with your mental machine, you have done nor said anything to indicate it since you came into this room. I believe you to be perfectly *compos mentis*."

"And you are right. I am as sound of mind as any man in this city. But, though I am perfectly sane, allow me to inform you that I am not wholly master of my own will."

The detective's first impression of his visitor, exactly.

"Not master of your own will?"

"That is my condition, sir, precisely."

"It is rather strange."

"Now, do you still believe me to be in possession of my mental faculties? Or do you begin to think I have rats in my upper story?"

"Why do you insist upon this point? Your statement is certainly a strange one, but it proves nothing in the question of your sanity or insanity. You have assured me that you are as sane as anybody, and I believe you are, as I have said. Why, then, do you still force the point?"

"Because my best and most intimate friends believe that I am growing insane."

"Oh! I see."

"And now, perhaps, you are prepared to take sides with them."

"Prepared—yes; but I shall not do so until I am convinced that they are right."

"Good! That is just what I wanted you to say! I tell you that I am perfectly sane, and I want you to believe me so. If you do not, it will be useless for me to lay my case before you."

"Very well; I believe you perfectly sound, mentally. But how is it that you are not master of your own will? I confess you have aroused my curiosity."

"Just what I wanted to do. I want to see you thoroughly interested in my case. As to how—why I am not my own master, I— But I will put the case plainly before you without further delay, and then you will see."

"My name, as I have informed you, is Edmund Dillingsworth. I am the eldest son of Ezra Dillingsworth, the millionaire, who died about twenty years ago. You may never have heard of him."

"I have heard of him."

"Well, no matter. When my father died he left an estate which, including all his bonds, stocks, and so forth, was valued at nearly ten millions."

"He had three sons: I, my brother Charles, and my brother Boniface. He, the latter, was the youngest. The property was to be divided among us equally, and it was."

"At that time my brother Charles was married and had two children. One was Clarence Dillingsworth, aged four; and the other was Effie, aged two. These two are still living. Clarence is a manly fellow of twenty-four, and Effie is a handsome young lady of twenty-two."

"My brother Charles is dead. He died about six years ago. His will left all of his property to his children, to be divided between them equally when Effie became of age. It was divided between them about a year ago, giving each of them about two millions."

"My own wealth, at present, is about six millions."

"Go on, Mr. Dillingsworth, I am following you. What of your brother Boniface?"

"It is of him that I am about to speak. At the time of our father's death he was about thirty years of age. He is now about fifty. Neither he nor I have ever married. When he came into possession of his share of the fortune, he threw himself right into the sea of pleasure, and in a few years his millions were reduced to thousands, and, finally, the thousands to hundreds. Then he awoke and realized what he had done."

"I am following you, sir," said the detective, as the old gentleman paused again for a moment.

"Well, when he was actually reduced to poverty he came to Charles and me for help."

We consulted with each other, and, on his promising as faithfully that he would reform, we gave him a quarter of a million dollars with which to begin life anew. He thanked us, with tears in his eyes, took the money, and—reformed.

"Ah! I hardly expected that. But, pardon my interrupting."

"Yes," pursued Mr. Dillingsworth, with a sarcastic smile, "he reformed. He became a member of a religious order, and has ever since lived a most exemplary life."

Here the old gentleman paused again, leaving the detective completely at sea.

He, the detective, had expected to hear that Boniface Dillingsworth was plotting to obtain the wealth that belonged to his brother and brother's children.

But the old gentleman's sarcastic smile had not been lost upon him, and he was prepared for anything that was to follow.

"Now, Mr. Gilbert," the narrator questioned, after a moment's pause, "have you ever heard of the New Order of the Occident?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "I have."

"And you know what it is?"

"I do; or at any rate I have an idea."

"What do you understand it to be?"

"Why, I believe it is a sort of religious society, a charitable organization, or something of that kind."

"Exactly. And in the past it has done excellent work. But now, sir, it is rotten—it is rotten to the core!"

"But, what has that society to do with your case, Mr. Dillingsworth?"

"By heavens, sir, it has all to do with it! At the head of that Order to-day stands Boniface Dillingsworth, or 'Father Boniface,' as he is better known; a knave, a villain, a veritable *Rodin*!"

"Ah-ha! I see, I see."

"Yes, sir," repeated the old gentleman, now more animatedly, "my rascally brother now stands at the head of the New Order of the Occident, and it is my belief that he is using his position and power, and in fact the whole machine that is under his control, to serve his own ends. From an honorable society the Order has degenerated to a band of outlaws, who, under thin religious cloak, are guilty of crimes the most heinous. They make a show of living up to their former good work, but it is only a farce. All is rotten, rotten. They have no Church, no creed, no anything. They plot and plan to rob or assassinate wherever and whenever they can, and it is all done so secretly under their religious garb that no one suspects. They are far worse than the genuine burglar and cut-throat, who breaks into a bank at night and kills and robs, for he can be watched; while they, devils incarnate that they are! walk abroad in the light of day, wearing as a mask the garb they disgrace. And at their head, the chief of them all, is my own brother."

"But you say you cannot prove what you assert; did I not understand you so?"

"I cannot, though I know it is the truth."

"And this is why your friends say you are losing your mind, I suppose."

"You mistake. You are the first one to whom I have spoken about it."

"But you said Burton Goldsmith sent you to me, and surely you let him know something about your suspicions."

"Not a word. I merely asked him to direct me to a good detective, and he named you."

"I am at a loss, then, to understand why your friends think you are becoming demented. You are surely talking rationally enough to me, wild and improbable-sounding as your story is."

"I will explain that point. As I have told you, I am not master of my own will. Boniface Dillingsworth possesses powers almost superhuman. He has great strength of will, and is a most wonderful mesmerist, and has gained almost complete control over me. He can throw a spell over me, no matter where I happen to be, and, if he wills it, can draw me to him. And I am powerless to resist. Do you now understand?"

"Heavens! I can hardly credit so strange a story."

"It is God's truth—I swear it. And this is why I am called insane by my friends. In their very midst this spell is cast upon me, and I am forced to obey a will not my own. I know what I do, but am powerless to resist doing it. I know what to say, but I am powerless to say it. I am simply a machine. Do you believe this, Mr. Gilbert? Or do you too now believe that I am *non compos mentis*?"

"To be frank with you, Mr. Dillingsworth, I hardly know what to think. But, what do you want me to do?"

"Do you not see?"

"It is for you to tell me."

"Of course you are right. Well, the work I have for you to do is this: I want you to protect me and my brother Charles's children from the evil plots and machinations of Boniface Dillingsworth and the New Order of the Occident."

"You believe you and they are in danger, then?"

"I am sure we are! There is a dark plot to

put us out of the way, so that Boniface will come in for our property. Our lives are not safe a moment."

"But you have no proof of this, you say."

"None whatever. That is, none that would stand as proof. I, though, am convinced that it is so."

"And what has convinced you?"

"I do not know—I cannot explain—for it is all like a dream. Dark and horrible revelations have come to me of late, and it is my belief that when my brother Boniface exerts his power over me, I in a measure am enabled to know his thoughts."

"It is very strange. Have you spoken about it to your nephew or niece in any way?"

"No, sir. As I told you, I have mentioned it to no one save you. Were I to tell them my suspicion, they would look upon it as further proof of my failing intellect. Boniface visits them and me from time to time, and they believe him to be all that he pretends."

"Taken all in all, it is a wonderfully strange case," the detective mused, as he tapped idly with his pencil. "I have never heard of anything like it."

"Well, will you take it up for me, Mr. Gilbert, or do you decline?"

"What do you want me to do? You say you want me to protect you and your brother's children. How am I to do it? Can you give me any clue as to the nature of the plot you suspect? Or can you give me any points to bring to bear against that society? I—"

But the detective suddenly paused.

A noticeable change was coming over Mr. Dillingsworth. He was trembling, his face was taking on a vacant expression, and his eyes had a far-away look that proved that his wits had gone wool-gathering.

CHAPTER III.

THE DETECTIVE'S DECISION.

THE Steel Arm Detective had known and handled many peculiar cases, but this one promised to be something entirely new.

If Mr. Dillingsworth was not becoming mentally weak, but was really the victim of his brother's magnetic influence and evil designs, there promised to be lively work ahead for somebody; but the story he told sounded so improbable—so almost impossible—that the detective hardly knew what to think about it.

Now, however, a change had come over the old gentleman; one of his spells, whatever they were, was upon him; and the detective resolved to study it, if possible, and decide the question for himself.

If he decided that the man was really insane, the chances were that he would have nothing to do with his imagined wrongs. On the other hand, if he came to the conclusion that there really was something in the romance-like story he told, then he would take hold of the case and see what it would come to.

Mr. Dillingsworth continued to tremble, while the expression of his face grew more and more vacant. Once or twice he turned his eyes toward the detective, but some unseen power seemed to control them, and they were drawn away again instantly.

The detective remained perfectly still, and awaited to see what his visitor would do.

Presently the old gentleman made still another effort to resist the spell, whatever it was, and once more turned his eyes upon his companion.

"Mr. Gil—Gil—you see—I—" he managed to say, and then his mind was drawn away again and his eyes stared into vacancy as before.

But, Gilbert of Gotham understood, or believed he did, the broken words of the disconnected sentence.

He framed it thus:

"Mr. Gilbert, you see," or—"you see me now," or similar words; "I—" and there the break. Perhaps the ending words intended were—"I am now in his power."

Yes, the detective saw, and was interested. He was inclined to believe Mr. Dillingsworth was right, and made no response, but silently waited.

Presently Mr. Dillingsworth rose up, slowly, put on his hat and grasped his cane, and without a word advanced to the wall and tried to open an imaginary door.

He made several attempts, and then seemed to lose patience.

"The door!" he exclaimed. "Open the door, somebody!"

The detective did not move.

"I can't open the door!" the old man exclaimed again.

The door was on the opposite side of the room.

Several more attempts were made, the deluded old gentleman acting as though he really had hold of the knob of a door, but could not open it.

Then he suddenly changed his tactics. He let go his hold of the imaginary knob, and rapped on the wall with his cane, demanding:

"Open this door for me! Do you mean to detain me here against my will, Burton Goldsmith? Open the door, I say, and let me go!"

He evidently imagined that he was in the house of his friend, Mr. Goldsmith.

The detective saw that he must say or do something. The noise and loud tones were likely to be heard in the other rooms.

"Mr. Dillingsworth," he said, "pray sit down for a moment and—"

"Who are you?" was the instant demand of the magnetized old gentleman.

"Why, I am Gilbert, the detective; don't you know me?"

As he spoke, Mr. Gilbert crossed the room and laid his hand gently upon his visitor's arm.

Then the old gentleman turned at once, and seeing who it was, the light of intelligence flashed for a moment in his eyes.

"Oh! it is you, Gil—I— But I must go, Goldsmith, and at once. I think my brother wants to see me. I— Come, though, open the door. I tell you I must go!"

"But sit down a moment, Mr.—"

"Not a second! I must go! Hang it all, Burt, why do you always detain me, or else insist upon going home with me? I'm all right; you needn't trouble yourself about me. You act as though I were a boy of ten. Come! open the door and let me go! I tell you I'm wanted!"

"Who wants you?" demanded Gilbert of Gotham.

"My brother wants me. And I want to see Clare and Effie. I'm not their guardian any longer, I know, but they are just as much a care to me, and they need me. Open the door, Burt, and let me out."

"I will go with you," said the detective, decisively.

"Yes, I suppose you're bound to do that, so come on. Open the door and let's start. Yes, yes: I'm coming—coming!"

The last words were spoken in a louder key, as though addressed impatiently to a person at a distance who was constantly calling and urging him to hasten.

Again the unfortunate man tried to open the chimerical door.

When Gilbert of Gotham said "I will go with you," it was his intention to do so.

The next moment he changed his mind. A new thought came to him, and he decided to try an experiment.

When he was a young man at college he was looked upon as something of a mesmerist. In truth, there were three or four of his fellow students over whom he could exercise his magnetic powers. He had, as has been said, remarkable strength of will, and to that, to a far greater extent than he had ever realized, was due his somewhat extraordinary success as a detective. At college, though, he had never made much use of his peculiar power, and for this reason: He could not show it with any degree of success, save over the three or four mentioned, and most of the others expressed their opinion that it was a well-understood trick among them. A few owned that Gilbert could give them a peculiar sensation when he tried to mesmerize them, but their evidence was scarcely counted. Because he could not place the whole college under his mesmeric influence, there was the cry of "fraud," and so in disgust he gave up practicing the novel art. Had he continued it, he might have developed his powers to a wonderful degree; but it had been asleep and forgotten since his college days.

The new thought that now came to him was this: He would try his long-forgotten power once more, the strange story he had heard and the still stranger action of his visitor having brought it to mind; and would pit his strength against that of the scheming brother.

What the result would be he had no idea, but he decided to try the experiment, anyhow.

Recalling how he had exerted his influence of superior will-power over his three or four college-days subjects, he once more laid his hand upon Mr. Dillingsworth's arm and drew him around.

"Come on, if you're ready," the old gentleman urged; "open this confounded door, and—I—I—"

Gilbert of Gotham had caught his gaze, and fixed eyes upon eyes.

Mr. Dillingsworth ceased speaking, his muscles relaxed, and he became calm.

"Sit down," directed the detective, and he was obeyed.

The detective, too, took a chair, still holding the old gentleman's gaze.

For a moment neither moved or spoke.

The detective was about to ask a question, to test his strangely and doubly mesmerized "subject," when he noticed that the old man's face was assuming a new expression.

The vacant, meaningless stare was disappearing, and taking its place was an expression of cunning and craftiness. The eyes grew bright, and flashed with a snaky glitter, and a satanic smile presently parted the lips.

The detective was astonished. He could hardly believe it was the same man.

The smile deepened on the old face, the expression of countenance grew more decided, and in a moment more he laughed aloud.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he broke out in a harsh, cold voice; and then followed these strange words:

"Went to see a detective, did he? As though a detective would listen to him! I'll make him prove himself crazy, and that will end his interview there. I have concentrated my thoughts

upon him, and he will be at home within half an hour if he has to wade through blood to get there. Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a pause.

Gilbert of Gotham was puzzled. He knew not what to make of this. What wonderful change had come over the old gentleman now? Surely he was not himself, and the words he uttered were not born of his own thoughts. What did it mean?

After a few moments' pause, during which time Mr. Dillingsworth sat as though listening, he spoke again:

"Well, little good will it do him. I tell you, Knight, I will have him at home within half an hour, and that detective will be willing to swear that he is as mad as a hatter. He is the most susceptible man—I mean the most susceptible subject to mesmeric influence that I ever saw. And I have complete control over him."

Again a pause.

The detective, while he still held the subject's eyes fixed upon his own, could only listen in silent amazement. What was the secret of the wonderful change? In what way had his influence brought it about? It is acknowledged that the possibilities of animal magnetism are far from being understood. Was this not a case of semi-transanimation? Was not Mr. Dillingsworth actually speaking in unison with some other person? Had the detective ever seen Boniface Dillingsworth, or heard his voice, he would have recognized at once his face, his manner, and his voice, too, in the man before him; but, having never seen him, he could only guess.

The pause was of a few moments' duration, as before, and then the automaton—such the old gentleman was, and nothing more—spoke again:

"You are right," he said, evidently in reply to some person who had spoken during the pause, as the detective correctly surmised; "I will now let him feel his master's hand. We now know that he suspects us, and he will do all he can to expose us. But he cannot do it. I have caused his best friends to believe that he is growing insane, and anything that he may say against the New Order of the Occident, will be looked upon as further proof that his mind is diseased. Ha, ha, ha! I tell you we hold the winning cards, Knight, and are bound to win. Edmund Dillingsworth's millions shall be ours."

Again a pause.

Gilbert of Gotham now began to understand it all. He saw that his visitor's story, wild and improbable as it had seemed, was undoubtedly true, and he then resolved to take the case. True, it was likely to prove a difficult one, and perhaps one bristling with dangers; but, that was just what this man of steel liked. He had heard the unfortunate man's story, had now witnessed that which satisfied him it was true, and firmly resolved then and there to foil the scheming brother if it lay in his power.

With his mind full of stirring thoughts, he was forgetting to hold his mesmeric power over his subject, and suddenly he was reminded of it in a startling manner.

CHAPTER IV.

ALEXIS KNIGHT AND FATHER BONIFACE.

MR. EDMUND DILLINGSWORTH, when he entered the hall, or lobby, of the large down-town insurance building, did not know that his movements were being watched.

But such was the fact; a spy was following him.

The spy was a young man, perhaps thirty years of age. He was of medium height, straight and well-proportioned, and had an easy and graceful carriage. His face was one that had to be called good-looking, though its expression at times was not all that might be desired to make it handsome. The features were clear-cut and regular, and the head was of good shape, but the eyes, although black and bright, were not such as an expert physiognomist would pronounce honest. His hair was dark-brown in color, and a mustache graced his lip.

He was clad in a neatly-fitting business suit of dark material, wore a cloth hat, and carried a light cane.

When Mr. Dillingsworth paused to look at the signs, as explained, this young man stepped quickly behind a near-by pillar and watched him.

And he was near enough to catch the words which Mr. Dillingsworth uttered in a half-aloud tone. "Ah! here it is: 'Nathan Gilbert, Private Detective, Room No. 21.' I wonder whether I shall find him in?" were the words; and then the old gentleman turned and entered the elevator, and his shadower hastened up the broad stairs.

When Mr. Dillingsworth entered the detective's office, Alexis Knight—that was his shadower's name—was watching him from the top of the stairs some distance away.

"Ah! there he goes, sure enough," the young man exclaimed under his breath, "and Father Boniface was right. He certainly has learned—or suspects—something. What can it be?"

Leaving his post, he descended the stairs, passed out upon the street, and hastened away.

"My work is done, now," he mused as he walked, "and I must hasten to report what I have learned."

Alexis Knight was reputed rich. His father had certainly been well-to-do, but whether or not the young man had run through the fortune, was an open question.

He continued to live well, moved in a good circle of society, and had plenty of money to spend.

Some declared that the fortune left him by his father was on its last hundreds, and was about to disappear, while others hinted that perhaps the young man had other resources.

Be that as it might, he certainly had an eye to business, for he was making an effort to win the hand of pretty Effie Dillingsworth, of whom more anon.

Hurrying to the nearest station of the Elevated, the young man took a train for uptown.

He rode for some distance, showing more or less impatience every time the train stopped, and finally alighted and hastened to the street.

Turning his steps to the west, he walked rapidly away in that direction, two or three blocks, then turned one block to the north, and then again faced west.

Half-way down that block he came to a stop. Here was a stone wall, about ten feet in height, running a little more than half the length of the block.

In that wall, and right where Alexis Knight had stopped, was an iron door.

This door was of open-work in the upper half, and beyond the wall could be seen a beautiful space of green and shade.

Springing lightly up the two or three low steps that led to the door, the young man pulled the bell.

In a moment the call was answered.

A short, thick-set man, wearing a sort of monkish cowl, appeared at the door, or gate—as it might be quite as properly called and inquired:

"What do you want?"

"I want to see Father Boniface," the young man promptly answered.

"On business?"

"On important business."

"Your name, please?"

"My name is Knight. Have you not admitted me often enough to dispense with these idle questions? Surely you must know by this time that Father Boniface never refuses to see me."

"My orders are strict, sir," was the response, "and I shall ask you the same questions when you come here the thousandth time. Wait a moment and I will return."

"Very well; only make haste. My business is urgent."

"I will do so."

The man was gone only a few brief moments, and then he opened the iron gate, saying:

"Father Boniface will see you."

"Where will I find him?" the young man inquired.

"In his private audience-room, sir."

"All right."

Knight passed up the broad walk that led to a large building, and the other man closed and locked the gate.

The building had a quiet, even a solemn appearance. It was three stories high, with a flat roof, and in shape was nearly square. In front it was shaded by several big trees, and its high, unbroken wall prevented the passers-by from looking in.

The only opening in the wall was the little door we have mentioned.

On the front side the wall ran the whole length of the block, and a little more than half the length, or width, on the side streets. In the rear, and facing the street on that side, was a large warehouse, the rear wall of which was not broken by even a single window.

Thus this grim, quiet old house was practically shut out—or rather shut in—from the rest of the world.

The broad walk led from the gate to the front of the house, where it became still wider as it neared the steps of the portico.

Out under the trees near the front wall were seated several men, all wearing black cowls and gowns, but they paid no attention to the young man further than a glance at him as he advanced toward the portico.

Going up the steps, Knight crossed the portico and entered the hall, the door of which stood open.

There he was stopped.

A large, strong-framed man suddenly stepped out in front of him, and, with something of a military air, commanded him to halt.

This man, too, wore the peculiar black cowl and gown of the New Order of the Occident—for this, to explain, was their retreat.

"Halt!" he commanded.

Knight obeyed at once.

"Where are you going?" the man demanded.

"To see Father Boniface."

"Have you the pass-word?"

"I have."

"Let me hear it."

Knight whispered a word into his ear.

"All right," said the guard, "you may pass on."

"This looks to me like nonsense," the young man declared, with an air of disgust. "You know me and I know you, and yet you must always challenge me as though you had never seen me before."

The guardman smiled.

"I can't help it," he declared. "We have our orders, and orders must be obeyed."

"That is all right, but it seems to me like overdoing the thing a little."

Alexis Knight had the pass-word, but as yet he was not one of the Order. He was a catechumen, or probationer, and had not risen to the honor of a cowl and gown. His father, though, had been one of the leading men of the Order and it was but natural to suppose that the son would follow in his tracks.

The New Order the Occident recognized the church, and did not compel its members to celibacy. In truth, its views were decidedly liberal.

Passing down the hall, the young man soon came to a large door on his right and there he stopped and knocked.

"Come in!" called a voice, and the young man opened the door and entered.

The room was of good size and well furnished, and in an easy-chair near one of its windows reclined Father Boniface.

Boniface Dillingsworth was about fifty years of age, though he did not look to be more than forty-five. He was sleek and fat, and was very evidently fond of high living and good wine.

He had been reading, but when the young man opened the door he was looking in that direction, naturally.

"Ha! it is you," he exclaimed.

"Yes," Knight responded, "it is I. I have news for you."

"So I imagined when your name was telephoned from the gate."

"And no matter how important it might be, I could not get in here until I had been stopped and questioned by the guardsmen, who know me as well as you do. It seems to me there is a good deal of nonsense about it all. One would imagine this a garrisoned fort in times of war, instead of a quiet and inoffensive friary."

"You don't understand it aright, my son."

"I suppose not."

"Indeed you do not. If we are ever cautious in times of peace, we cannot be taken by surprise in the time of sudden danger."

"That is all right; but I ought to be well enough known here by this time to be admitted without challenge every time I come in."

"Well, such are our rules, and you must needs conform to them. I, too, am challenged, and I am the head of the Order."

"It may be a good thing, but in my opinion it is becoming a great nuisance."

"We will not discuss the point. I do what I think is best for the good of the Order. But, what is the news you have for me?"

"It is concerning Edmund Dillingsworth."

"Ha! what has he been doing?"

"He is now in the office of one of the best detectives in New York."

"The deuce he is!"

"Exactly; and does this not prove that you were right in your suspicion? He must have learned something, or else suspects something. What can it be?"

"He has not learned anything of our plans, you may be sure. What he suspects I cannot tell, but I have noticed in his manner of late that he is not the same toward me. He seems to fear me, though I strive to hold his confidence. Do not interrupt me, now, and I will cast a spell over him and bring him here."

Father Boniface leaned back in his chair, then, stared fixedly at the wall. He was concentrating all his thoughts upon his brother Edmund.

What the effect was the reader has seen.

For several minutes Boniface sat thus in silence, his eyes staring straight ahead at the wall, and his whole manner strained and intense.

Presently he leaned back in his chair, and an expression of cunning and craftiness came over his face. His eyes grew bright and flashed with a snaky glitter, and a satanic smile parted his lips. The smile deepened, the expression of countenance grew more decided, and in a moment he laughed aloud.

"Ha, ha, ha!" in a harsh, cold voice; "went to see a detective, did he? As though a detective would listen to him. I'll make him prove himself crazy, and that will end his interview there. I have concentrated my thoughts upon him, and he will be at home within half an hour if he has to wade through blood to get there. Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER V.

VIEWING THE SITUATION.

ANIMAL magnetism is something about which comparatively little is understood. Its possibilities are unknown. Many strange phenomena are noted, and wonderful coincidences frequently occur, but we are unable to explain the how—the why. The key has not yet been found that will open the sealed door, and until it shall have been, we can speak of the strange phe-

nomena and wonderful coincidences only by conjecture.

If the reader follow us, then, with the expectation of finding the secret revealed herein, he will follow us in vain. We can set forth the facts, but we cannot explain them.

We have seen how Boniface Dillingsworth, by the exercise of his superior will-power, magnetic influence, and mesmeric force, cast a spell over his brother Edmund, regardless of absence and distance, and made him obey the superior will; and we have seen how Nathan Gilbert, in exercising his mesmeric power over Edmund Dillingsworth as an experiment, reduced him to an automaton; but to explain *how* these things were done is impossible.

But, to proceed.

"Yes," responded Alexis Knight, when Father Boniface ceased speaking and ended his laugh, "I followed him to the office, saw him read the sign, and then he took the elevator and went up. I ran quickly up-stairs, and saw him enter the detective's office."

"Well, little good will it do him. I tell you, Knight, I will have him at home within half an hour, and that detective will be willing to swear that he is as mad as a batter. He is the most susceptible man—I mean the most susceptible subject to mesmeric influence—that I ever saw. And I have complete control over him."

"And now you have the proof that he suspects you, and no doubt he will strive to show fight. I suppose you will now let him feel your power in good earnest."

"You are right; I will now let him feel his master's hand. We now know that he suspects us, and he will do all he can to expose us. But he cannot do it. I have caused his best friends to believe that he is growing insane, and anything that he may say against the New Order of the Occident will be looked upon as further proof that his mind is diseased. Ha, ha, ha! I tell you we hold the winning cards, Knight, and are bound to win. Edmund Dillingsworth's millions shall be ours!"

"I hope they may, and soon," declared the young man, earnestly; "for to admit the truth, Father Boniface, I am not overstocked with funds."

"Don't let that trouble you, my son. You shall soon have all you can desire."

"You mean to set the ball rolling at once, then?"

"I do."

"And what about your niece, Effie Dillingsworth? I hope you have not forgotten your promise that she shall become my wife."

"No, I have not forgotten. You continue to assist me as you have been doing, and you shall be well rewarded."

"You mean that you will use your influence with the young lady, and help me to gain her hand and fortune?"

"Exactly; I will do all I can for you, and I guess you may look upon her as yours."

"That is all I ask, and I am satisfied with your promise. In return, you have but to command my services in any way you will."

"Very well. But, go ahead, now, and give me the full account of your morning's work."

"Are you not relaxing your power over your brother, while talking to me?"

"Not in the least. I have practiced the art on him for so long that I can hold him with scarcely an effort."

"It is wonderful, and I cannot understand it."

"Nor can I," Boniface admitted. "I can exercise the gift, but I cannot explain it. And not only can I not explain it, but I cannot realize the extent of my power. Some day, though, the veil will be drawn aside, and a new world will be opened before us. We shall—But this is no time for a dissertation; go ahead with your report."

"Well, following your instructions of yesterday, I set out to play the spy upon your brother Edmund. Nothing of importance took place yesterday. He went out only once, in the afternoon, and then he rode up to Central Park and spent an hour there. In the evening I called at the house, ostensibly to see Effie. The old gentleman complained of not feeling well, and retired early."

"This morning I returned to the neighborhood of the Dillingsworth residence at a reasonable hour, and took up a position where I could watch the house."

"When I had been there about an hour I saw the old gentleman come out. I followed him at a safe distance. He went to the residence of Mr. Burton Goldsmith."

"Oh ho!"

"You are surprised?"

"No, not that."

"What then?"

"Why, Edmund and Goldsmith are firm friends, and the thought came to me that perhaps he has been voicing his suspicions, whatever they may be, to him."

"It is quite likely."

"Well, go on."

"Well, the old gentleman remained there perhaps half an hour, and then he went directly down-town."

"Where did he go then?"

"He went at once to the office of the detective."

"Made no inquiries?"

"None whatever."

"Went straight there, with no hesitation?"

"Exactly."

"Then it seems clear to me that he must have obtained the detective's name and address from Burton Goldsmith."

"So I thought at once."

"And if he consulted with him, and inquired of him for a detective, no doubt he made him fully acquainted with his suspicions."

"It would be natural."

"Certainly."

"But what do you imagine his suspicions are?"

"It is impossible to guess. But, as I said before, he has not learned anything of our plans, that is certain. What he suspects I cannot tell, but rest assured that it is a suspicion only. He knows nothing to a certainty."

"You said you have noticed a change in his manner toward you."

"Yes; and that was what aroused my suspicions and led me to set you to watching him. And what you have learned proves, as you said, that I have grounds for suspecting him."

"There is no doubt now about that part of it."

"Well, go on with your report."

"I followed him, as I said, and he went straight to the detective. When he entered the building he stopped for a moment to look at the signs, to learn the location of the detective's office, and then he entered the elevator and went up. I hurried up by way of the stairs and saw him enter the office; and my work being then done, as I considered it, I hastened here to let you know what I had learned."

"You did right. By coming here at once you have given me the chance to throw a spell over him while in the detective's presence, and he will certainly be considered crazy. That is, provided he remained there until you arrived here."

"If he did not, his visit was a short one. I lost no time by the way, and came up by the Elevator."

"It is quite probable that he is still there—or rather that he *was* still there, when you reached here. Now, ten to one he is hastening toward home."

"Well, what next is to be done?"

"One moment, first. Where is that detective's office?"

Knight explained.

"And what is his name?"

"His name is Nathan Gilbert."

"And you say he is one of the best detectives in New York?"

"So he is accounted. He is called Gilbert of Gotham, and does quite a large business, as I have heard."

"Well, we cannot guess what passed between Edmund and him, but I shall learn."

"How can you learn it?"

"Oh! in one way or another. I might call at his office and demand to know."

"Would that not be playing into his hands? Would he not be likely to misconstrue your motive? Instead of a kindly interest in your brother in his state of failing mental powers, might he not imagine you had some reason to feel uneasy and a desire to throw him off the track?"

"Perhaps you are right. Suppose, however, I go there ostensibly to engage a detective to watch over Edmund and take care of him."

"That would be better; but still I would not advise going to see the detective at all."

"No?" questioningly.

"I would not."

"And why?"

"Because when a man sets out to hoodwink a professional detective, he takes a big contract, and the chances are that he will get badly euchered."

"There is something in that, certainly."

"And especially when that detective is Nathan Gilbert."

"Well, I will consider the point well before I act. I must get the information somehow, and perhaps I can get it out of Edmund himself. We shall see."

"Just what I was about to suggest."

"Really, though, there is little reason why we should trouble ourselves at all. I am making Edmund appear to be going crazy, and if I keep on he will eventually be sent to an asylum. In the mean time, whatever he may say against me or the Order, will be set down as the idle murmurings of a diseased mind."

"But suppose he knows more than you think, and the detective interests himself in the matter?"

"It is hardly probable."

"But it is possible."

"Well, in such an event I would say—*Let that detective look well to his health!*"

Father Boniface leaned forward as he spoke, and hissed the words in a way calculated to chill the blood of a timid man.

"I see it would not be very healthy work for him," remarked Knight, with a smile.

And Boniface smiled in return, a smile that

expressed as much as words could have conveyed.

"But," the latter said, "let us hope that we shall have nothing to do with detectives. And now I believe I will walk over to the Dillingsworth residence and be there to meet my crack-brained brother when he arrives. Will you accompany me?"

"Yes, if I may."

"Certainly."

Father Boniface rose and threw off his gown, and in its place put on a long, black coat. Then he donned a broad-brimmed black hat of rather a Quakerish pattern, grasped a heavy cane, and was ready for the street.

Calling the tall guardsman, then, he gave him some instructions, and then signifying to Knight that he was ready, led the way out of the house and out of the grounds.

They turned their steps at once toward that part of the city where the Dillingsworth residence was situated, talking as they walked along and in due time arrived at their destination.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER CASE INVOLVED.

GILBERT OF GOTHAM might have heard considerable more than he did of the foregoing conversation between Boniface Dillingsworth and Alexis Knight, through the medium of Edmund Dillingsworth, had he not allowed the latter to escape from his mesmeric control.

The detective's mind was full of thoughts, though, and he forgot to hold his magnetic influence over his subject.

Suddenly he was reminded of it, as stated, in a startling manner.

The moment the old gentleman escaped the power of the detective's will, he sprung to his feet exclaiming:

"We'll be off! I tell you, Burt, you sha'n't detain me another minute!"

And before the detective could interfere he crossed the room, this time finding the door, and was gone.

Instantly the detective struck twice upon a little call-bell that stood on one corner of his desk.

Immediately the large book-case swung around and a tall man in black stepped into the room, closing the novel door behind him.

"Follow the old gentlemen who just left this room," the detective ordered briefly; "see that no harm comes to him on the way, and come back at once and let me know where he goes. Follow him home."

"Yes, sir."

No more was said, and the tall man in black hastened away to carry out the instructions.

Then Gilbert of Gotham leaned back in his chair to reflect.

It was the strangest case he had ever taken hold of. As stated before, he had known and handled many peculiar ones, but this one promised to be something new.

One point was settled: He would take the case. He now believed Mr. Dillingsworth's story, improbable as it had at first appeared to be, and he meant to sift the matter to the bottom.

What puzzled him was the wonderful exhibition of the power and possibilities of animal, or, better named, vital magnetism which he had just witnessed. That was a mystery that lay beyond his ability to ferret out. It was something that he could not understand.

It was plain to him that while the old gentleman was under the influence of both his brother and him, that his natural mind had been in a perfect state of abeyance. He had been a machine—a perfect automaton. Those few moments would always be a blank to him. He had been like one in a trance, except that he had been speaking the thoughts of another brain.

When Gilbert had caught his eye and cast his own influence over him, the old gentleman was cut short in what he was saying. When he escaped the detective's influence his first words were the very ones he had been about to utter when interrupted.

This Gilbert had noticed instantly.

The sentence is worth repeating:

"Come on, if you're ready," the old gentleman was saying, imagining that he was speaking to his friend, Mr. Goldsmith; "open this confounded door, and I—I—" and there came the break in the sentence. Then when he came to he took the sentence up right where he had been interrupted, and went on with, "we'll be off! I tell you, Burt, you sha'n't detain me another minute!" The conjunction "and" made the sentence perfect.

Yes, the Steel Arm Detective had now undoubted proof that Mr. Dillingsworth's strange story was true.

The words the old fellow had uttered while under the in-trance spell, the sentences he had repeated—or more properly spoken in unison with Boniface, were proofs positive, almost.

Could it be that Edmund Dillingsworth was playing a part to deceive? that he had not been unconscious—or rather mesmerized—at all?

This question came into the detective's mind, but he cast it away again at once.

No, he decided, there was no *play* about it. He had read Mr. Dillingsworth like an open

book; it was awfully real; what the old gentleman had said had the ring of a genuine conversation about it.

"Went to see a detective, did he?" the detective mused, as he recalled the words; "as though a detective would listen to him." The detective *did* listen to him, all the same, my pious friend, and your little game to 'make him prove himself crazy and end the interview' did not work. Ha! ha! ha! I should think not! What if you could know just how it did work?

"And this man 'Knight,' the detective's thoughts ran on, "who can he be? Some third-rate detective who turns his talents in the wrong direction, perhaps, but more likely some personal friend of the leading rascal, and one who has a personal interest at stake. The latter is the more likely correct. Yes, to be sure; for did not the automaton repeat—if it was repeating—'Edmund Dillingsworth's millions shall be ours?' It may be that he referred to their Order, though, of which Knight is no doubt a member. Yes, that must be it."

"I wish I could recall all that the subject—the unconscious medium said. Let me see—Ah! yes, here is something more; 'We now know that he suspects us, and will do what he can to expose us,' or similar words. 'But he cannot do it. I have caused his best friends to believe him insane, and anything he may say against the New Order of the Occident will be considered as further proof that he is crazy.' I cannot recall the exact words, but I remember the import well enough.

"Yes, Edmund Dillingsworth's story, wild and improbable as it seemed at first, is true, and I have decided to take the case. It is likely to prove anything but an easy one, and will perhaps give me all the adventure I can wish for; but, the more the merrier. I will foil that plotting brother, and if I find anything out of odor about that Order, I will do my best to air it a little.

"If I had only watched myself more closely, and held the old man under my power a little longer, I might have learned a great deal more. I am sorry I let the opportunity escape me so easily. I may be able to get the same chance again, however, and then I will know how to make the most of it. I—"

A knock at the door.

"Come in!" the detective invited.

The door opened and a young woman entered.

Gilbert of Gotham was instantly upon his feet and bowing with the air of a Chesterfield.

"You are Nathan Gilbert?" the young woman questioned.

"At your service," was the ready reply.

"Pray be seated."

"Thanks," seating herself gracefully. "I have called to see you on business, Mr. Gilbert."

"If I can serve you, I shall be happy to do so."

"I need the services of a detective, and knowing that you once served my father, I have come to you. I have— But resume your seat, Mr. Gilbert."

"Thanks. You say I once served your father?"

"Yes; my father is Mr. Burton Goldsmith. I am Charlotte Goldsmith."

"Ah! yes, I know Mr. Goldsmith, and have heard of you. Anything that I can do for you, you have but to command me."

"I have been robbed."

"Robbed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Of what?"

"A diamond necklace."

"And you desire me to recover it if I can?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is the value of the necklace?"

"Thirty thousand dollars."

"Can you describe it?"

"Yes."

"Please do so."

Miss Goldsmith gave a careful and minute description of the stolen article.

"Now," said the detective, "I must question you a little."

"I will answer everything as freely and fully as possible, for I want to give you every item I can to assist you."

"Very well. In the first place, then, do you suspect any one?"

"I do not."

"Have you mentioned your loss to any one?"

"No, sir."

"Not even to your father?"

"Not even to him. It was he who gave me the necklace, and I want, if possible, to recover it before he learns that it has been stolen."

"I see. Now, when did you see the necklace last?"

"Yesterday."

"And when did you discover that it was gone?"

"This morning."

"Where did you keep it?"

"In a box in the top drawer of a bureau in my bedroom."

"Was that bureau locked?"

"Yes, sir."

"And where was the key?"

"In my pocket, on a small ring with several others."

"Were those keys out of your possession between the time when you last saw your diamonds and the time when you found they were gone?"

"No, sir; or at least not to my knowledge. I am pretty certain they were not."

"You slept at home last night?"

"I did."

"Was your bedroom door locked?"

"It was."

"When do you think the theft was committed?"

"It must have been between four in the afternoon and ten in the evening, yesterday; or between eight and nine this morning."

"Was the bureau opened by force?"

"No, sir, I found it locked and in perfect order."

"And the box?"

"That also."

"Have you recently shown the diamonds to any one?"

"No."

"Please tell me who called at the house between four o'clock yesterday and nine o'clock this morning."

"Only two persons called, so far as I know. They were Mr. Thorne Oldwood, a young gentleman who called upon me in the evening; and Mr. Edmund Dillingsworth, who called this morning to see my father."

"Of course we can suspect neither of them."

"Oh! no!"

"Do you have a waiting-maid?"

"I do."

"And she has free access to your bedroom?"

"Yes, at all hours day and night."

"Do you imagine it can have been she who—"

"Oh! that is not to be thought of!"

"Why not?"

"Because I have known Fanny for so long. She is perfectly honest. She has had a thousand opportunities to steal, if she were inclined to do so."

"Is there any other servant in the house whom you would be more ready to suspect?"

"I cannot suspect one of them. They are all tried and true."

"Your mother is dead, I believe."

"Yes."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"No."

"Any other relative living in the house besides your father?"

"No."

"Perhaps he knows something about the necklace."

"No, that is out of the question."

"Then it is certainly a mystery how the diamonds were taken, and by whom."

"It is, indeed."

"Is it not possible that you have put them in some other place, and forgotten where?"

"No, that is impossible. I am not so forgetful."

CHAPTER VII.

GILBERT SCORES A POINT.

CHARLOTTE GOLDSMITH was a charming girl of twenty. She was not a stately beauty; instead, there was something almost childish in her delicate face. She was pretty, in her way, but not really beautiful. She had a rosy mouth, a pure complexion, laughing blue eyes, half-hidden at times by their long lashes; and a wealth of golden hair.

She was of medium height, was well proportioned, and her movements were graceful, yet determined.

Charlotte was the only child of old Burton Goldsmith, the retired jeweler. Her mother was dead, and she and her father were the only occupants of the stately Goldsmith residence, except their housekeeper and other servants.

Burton Goldsmith was rich, and his daughter had everything she could wish for. His chief end and aim was to make her happy.

Of course Charlotte did not lack for admirers, being rich and good-looking. She had them in plenty, and not a few lovers. But she was no flirt.

Foremost among her suitors were Clarence Dillingsworth and Thorne Oldwood, both young men of good families, and said to be well supplied with worldly goods.

As for Charlotte, her preference among all her admirers was undoubtedly Clarence Dillingsworth.

It was said— But this digression is unpardonable.

Gilbert of Gotham remained silent for some moments after his pretty visitor's last words.

He was thinking.

Presently he said:

"You tell me you have mentioned your loss to no one; did I not understand you so?"

"To no one except you."

"Not even your maid knows it?"

"Not even she. I have told no one at all but you."

"Then do me the favor to keep it a profound secret, and I will do all I can to recover the gems."

"I will do so."

"But tell me, Miss Goldsmith, how is it that you have come to me instead of going to the police?"

"Easily explained. I heard Mr. Dillingsworth inquire of my father where he could find a good detective, and father told him to go to 'Nathan Gilbert, No. — Broadway.' I put down your name and address, and here I am. Only for that, I would, no doubt, have gone to the police."

"Easily explained, true enough. Yes, Mr. Dillingsworth was here only a short time ago; poor old gentleman! Are you acquainted with him?"

"Yes, I know him well, sir."

"I fear he is losing his reason. His actions and manner while here were very peculiar."

"Yes, we have all noticed it. That is, papa and I and several others. We fear he is growing insane."

"I think he is. He came here to lay a case before me, but there was clearly nothing in it."

"So papa said when he left our house."

"Then he told your father about it?"

"No, he did not say what he wanted a detective for, but papa said it must be 'some new rat that had got into his attic,' to repeat his very words. He said as you say, there was nothing in it."

"No, the poor old gentleman is quite evidently losing his reason. I had to promise to take his case, and I may call and see him to-morrow. Are you— But you said you *are* well acquainted with him. Can you tell me where he resides? I neglected to ask him for his address. I suppose I could easily find it in the Directory, however."

"He lives at No. — Fifth avenue."

"Thanks. I will remember the number. He is an old bachelor, is he not?"

"Yes."

"And perhaps lives all alone."

"Oh, no! Clarence and Effie Dillingsworth, his nephew and niece, reside with him. They are the children of his brother Charles, who died some years ago. Edmund was their guardian until they became of age. He always lived with his brother Charles."

"And there is another brother, is there not?"

"Yes; Boniface Dillingsworth."

"Where is he?"

"Here in New York."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What sort of a person is he?"

"A very fine man, and the head of some monastic society. He is all that is good and noble."

"Is he on friendly terms with Edmund and his nephew and niece?"

"Yes, very. And Clarence and Effie think a great deal of him—especially Effie."

"You are evidently quite intimate with Effie."

"Oh, yes! we are like sisters."

"And you must know Clarence, of course. It is needless to ask that."

A telltale blush came to the young lady's cheeks for an instant.

"Her lover," the detective guessed.

"Yes, I know him too," she replied.

"What is their opinion of their uncle's mental condition?"

"They realize that his mind is growing weak, and are very much distressed. It is indeed very sad."

"Have they taken any steps toward having him examined by competent medical authority?"

"If so, I have not heard of it. I think not."

"I think— But, pardon me, Miss Goldsmith! I am neglecting your case to engage you in idle conversation. Pardon me. How came we to drift away from the important matter of business—the loss of your diamonds?"

"There is nothing to pardon, sir; the conversation took a natural turn in that direction. And as to its being idle, not so; for I am interested in everything concerning poor Mr. Dillingsworth. He has ever been a good friend to me, and papa and he are the best of friends."

"Well, to return to your loss. The thief left no clew of any kind, I suppose?" in a questioning tone.

"No, sir, none that I could discover."

"Has your maid, or any of the other servants, been out this morning?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Please give me the names of all the servants."

The young lady did so.

"What about your housekeeper?" the detective asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Could you suspect her?"

"No, decidedly."

"By the way, was it possible for any one to enter your bedroom from without—that is, by way of a window?"

"No, sir, I think not."

"When did you last wear your diamonds?"

"One night about a month ago, when I attended a ball."

"You must not think my questions idle; I am trying to get a ray of light in some direction."

"You are free to ask what you will, sir, and I will answer."

"Allow me, then, to inquire who was your escort that evening?"

"Mr. Clarence Dillingsworth."

"Where was the ball?"

He was told.

"Was Miss Dillingsworth there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you recall any instance of any one taking particular notice, I may say unusual notice, of your necklace that evening?"

"No, sir."

"Who escorted Miss Dillingsworth? It is possible that some one may have cast covetous eyes upon your gems that night. It is impossible to tell who is on hand at a large public ball."

"That is true. Her escort was Mr. Alexis Knight."

"I do not know him."

"He is a wealthy young gentleman, and belongs to our set. He is a friend of Clarence Dillingsworth's, and Mr. Boniface Dillingsworth thinks a great deal of him."

"By the way, you said you had a caller last evening, I believe."

"Yes."

"A Mr. Oldwood, if I remember aright."

"Yes; Mr. Thorne Oldwood."

"Who is he?"

"He is to be classed with Mr. Knight."

"Ah-ha!" the detective thought, but did not say, of course, "if that is strictly true in all respects, as well as the sense in which you mean it, my little lady, he may know something about your diamonds."

Aloud, he said:

"You mean that he belongs to your circle of society, and is, like Mr. Knight, a friend of the Dillingsworths?"

"Yes."

"Was he present at that ball?"

"Yes."

"Then, from one of the three gentlemen, perhaps I can learn something. They, as I said before, may have noticed some rascal eying your necklace in a suspicious manner."

"It is possible."

"Is there any other point you can give me that may prove helpful?"

"Not that I can think of."

"Where can I find Mr. Knight and Mr. Oldwood, in case I should desire to see them for the purpose named?"

Their addresses were given.

"Does Mr. Oldwood, too, enjoy the favor of the kindly regard of Mr. Boniface Dillingsworth?"

"Yes. It was Father Boniface—so he is called, you know—who introduced him to me?"

"At the Dillingsworth residence, I suppose."

"No; at my own home."

"Then Father Boniface, too, is a friend of your father's, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"All this is foreign to the point at issue, of course," the detective remarked, (the reader will see that it was entirely to the point), "and I will stop before you lose patience with me. I will now come direct to the case."

"I expected to be freely questioned, sir, when I came here."

"Then you have not been disappointed. But, now to business. You want me to undertake to recover your necklace."

"I do."

"Very well. Can you make room in your household for a new servant—a chambermaid, for instance?"

"Why in the world do you ask?"

"I want to send one of my female detectives into your house in that guise."

"Oh! I see. Yes, sir, I can."

"Very well. I will send a young woman to you this afternoon. I—Hold on, though, that position will not do at all. Your housekeeper will have too watchful an eye upon her. Can she not visit you as a friend, or—"

"I can suggest something, sir."

"Do so."

"I belong to a charitable union, one of the objects of which is to assist poor but worthy women to find employment. Let your assistant come to me with this card," giving a card, "and I can give her some light work while she is waiting for a better position. She can take the role of a once wealthy lady, if educated to—"

"Just the situation exactly!" the detective exclaimed. "I have another assistant who was once a society belle in a Western city, is highly educated, and is a perfect lady in every respect. I give her employment suited to her station, and will send her to you."

"Just the person. What is her name?"

"She will be known to you as 'Mrs. Clementine.' You may, however, win her confidence sufficiently to lead her to tell you her real name. I cannot do so."

"And she will call on me this afternoon?"

"Yes, this afternoon. I will give her instructions and you may trust her fully."

Some further exchange of remarks was made, and then Miss Goldsmith departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

RESPECTFULLY DECLINED.

SCARCELY could Miss Goldsmith have passed out of the building, when there came yet another knock at the detective's door.

"Business promises to be good to-day," Gilbert thought, "if this is another client."

He invited the knocker to come in, and the door opened and a genuine specimen of the genus "dude" entered the room half-timidly.

"Beg pawdon," he said, "but ith Mith Gilbert within?" speaking with a decided lisp.

"That is my name, sir," the detective responded; "what can I do for you?"

"Aw—are you Gilbert the detective?"

"I am."

"Aw—I am delighted to meet you, thir; I am indeed."

As he spoke, the dude shut the door softly and advanced to where the detective was seated, putting out his faultlessly-gloved hand in a half-hearted way, as though he did not know whether to intrust it into the detective's grasp or not.

Gilbert did not notice the offer, however, his attention being directed just then toward a chair which he pulled around into position.

"Be seated, sir," he invited.

"Aw—yeth, thank you, thir, I believe I will. I have called on buthineh of importanth, thir, and may ath well thit down, I thuppoth'. Pleath' acethept my cawd."

The detective took the dainty card and glanced at it, and read the rather high-sounding name, "E. Claude Montpensier."

"That ith my name, thir," the dude explained.

"So I naturally supposed."

"Aw—yeth, to be thure; ath though I would pwethent any other fellah'th cawd. Te, he, he! quite a joke, weally! By the way, I thuppoth' you notith' that I lithp. I cannot help it. I wath born tho. My mother thaid th'e notith'd it the firht time th'e heard me cw. Te, he, he!"

The detective smiled at the poor attempt at a joke.

E. Claude Montpensier is worthy of description. He was a young man, perhaps twenty-two, of medium height and decidedly slender build. He wore a shining silk hat of the latest style, a suit of very close-fitting black clothes, and a pair of sharp-toed patent-leather shoes. Over his black coat he wore a very light summer overcoat, which was shorter than the other by several inches, showing the claw-hammer tails to ridiculous advantage. His hands, as mentioned, were faultlessly gloved; his cuffs were large and glossy, and displayed large buttons; a single eye-glass, secured by a yard of ribbon to a button-hole, was screwed into one eye; and he carried a heavy silver-headed cane, upon which he was constantly sucking. His hair was short, with a suggestion of beard in front of each ear and considerable on the back of his neck; he had a faint appearance of mustache, which demanded a great deal of caressing; his eyes were large, pale and watery, and his lips seemed to have been made for the one purpose of puffing cigarettes.

"You are something of a joker, I see," the detective remarked.

"Bah Jovel you do me pwoud, weally!" E. Claude exclaimed. "That wath not a vewy good one, howevv; in fact, I have uthed it before. Thometim'th I can thay thingth weally witty; I can, I ath'ure you."

"You surprise me."

"Te, he, he! Yeth, weally witty, 'pon my word. Other night at the opewa I went out between the acth to thmoke a thigawette with chummy. When I weturned lady athked me why I went out to thmoke. I weplied that thmoke wath thoothing to the bwain. Te, he, he! Floored her completely. All th'e could thay wath that th'e never knew before why the young men of my thet thmoked thigawett'th inthtad of thegawth."

"Ha, ha, ha!" the detective laughed heartily, partly at the dude's earnest manner and peculiar lisp, and partly at the "floored" incident; "you certainly hit the lady hard. You should not be so severe in your replies to the fair ones. And in public, too. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quite good, wath it not?"

"It was mighty good," the detective had to confess.

And Mr. Montpensier smiled in a most satisfied way, sucked vigorously at his cane, and blinked through his eyeglass contentedly.

The detective waited a moment for him to state his business, and then said:

"You remarked, Mr. Montpensier, that you have called to see me on important business."

"Aw—yeth, twue enough. I want to engage you to do a little detective work for me."

"That is my business, sir, and if I can serve you I shall be happy to do so."

"Aw—yeth, and I like you, Gilbert; I do, weally. There ith nothing pwetentious about you. Thome fellabh in your thtation are wegular cadth, ye know, and don't know how to twent a gentleman wight. You are not one of thoth' fellabh, I'm thure."

"No, I know my place when a gentleman of higher station and bluer blood calls here, Mr. Montpensier. I sometimes feel a little ill at ease, a little overawed—as it were, but I strive to be as polite as I can."

"And vewy commendable it ith of you, too; vewy, indeed. Nothing ith more commendable in a twad'thman or profeth'ional man, than to

know hith plath. Weally, Gilbert, I like you vewy well indeed."

"I'm glad you do, sir. And now, if I may ask, what is the nature of the case you have for me?"

"I dethire you to wecover thome thtolen pwoperty, thir."

"Very well. Go ahead and give me the facts of the case, and then I will know whether I can take hold of it or not."

"Oh! but you mutht take it, Gilbert; weally you mutht!" the dude exclaimed.

"Well, we shall see. I never say I will take a case until I am made acquainted with the particulars. It would be folly to do so."

"Aw—don't be a cad, now, Gilbert, or I th'all not think tho well of you, ye know."

"I shall try not to be, my dear sir, for it would pain me very much to lose your good opinion. But, let us come to business."

"Aw—yeth, to be thure. But h'neth ith buthineh, ath I told my chummy the other day when he—"

"Pray pardon me, Mr. Montpensier," the detective interrupted, "but I must remind you that my time is more or less limited. Please lay your case before me without further delay."

"Weally, Gilbert, you annoy me by urging me tho. You mutht be aware that it wequires careful thought to explain a complicated cath' tho that it can be weadily gwathped by an ordinawy mind."

"Quite true; some minds are not capable of grasping the most simple facts."

"Now you're talking like yourthelf again," the dude exclaimed, his face lighting up.

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"Aw—I will give you the facth at wunth. I will welate the whole thing to you, and then you will be able to underthand it the better."

"Very well, go ahead."

"What I am about to tell you, thir, ith told in confidenth'."

"Of course."

"It conthernth a lady."

"No matter."

"And it ith weally howwible!"

"I guess I can stand it."

"Yeth; and, aw—my whole future happineth' or mithery dependth upon the wethult."

"Indeed!"

"It ith twue, 'pon me word."

"Well, let me hear your story."

"Aw—ath I thaid, it conthernth a lady, and that lady ith Mith' Antoinette De Thmythe, the fairetht belle in all New York."

"Miss Antoinette De Smythe?"

"Yeth, De Thmythe; thpelled *Eth-m-y-t-h-e*."

"All right, go ahead."

"Aw—well, th'e ith a chawming lady in ewwy wethpect, and I love her. Th'e ith—"

"It is not necessary to describe her, Mr. Montpensier; keep to the main fact, please."

"Pway don't interwupt me, Gilbert, or I can't keep the awful matter stwaight. Aw—let me thee; yeth, now I have it wight. Don't interwupt me, now, I beg."

"I won't, so go ahead."

"Aw—ath I thaid, Mith' De Thmythe ith the fairetht woman in all New York, and I love her. Th'e ith all in all to me, and I did hope to make her my wife. But now all ith changed, and my hopeth are nearly gone. Now I dare not athk her for her hand."

"That is certainly bad."

"It ith indeed."

"What has happened to crush your fond hopes so?"

"Ah! that ith the thad thtory I have to tell you. You thee I called upon her yetherday afternoon and took her out for a pwomenade. Th'e wath chawmingly dweth'd in thatin, and we were the motht attwactive couple on the avenue, bah Jovel!"

"Mith' De Thmythe wore her large and valuable diamond earwings, and altho a vewy large and cothtly diamond pin, which were the thynothure of all ey'th. We attwacted a gweat deal of attenthion, you may be thure."

"I do not doubt it."

"Aw—yeth, we did, twuly. You thee I cawwed my largetht and motht attractive cane, and Mith' De Thmythe cawwed her chawming little dawg, which wath newly dyed to match her pwetty dweth'. I tell you, Gilbert, we are the pwide of our thet; we are, bah Jovel!"

"Of course, of course."

All this was very trying to the detective's patience, but he realized that the quietest way to get at the facts of the case was to let the dude run on, so he did not urge him.

But Mr. Montpensier was nearing the main point now.

"Aw—yeth, we are indeed, I ath'ure you," he said. "But, I mutht let let you know what the trouble ith, tho you will underthand what I want you to do."

"Well, pwethently Mith' De Thmythe put Claude—you thee th'e hath named her dawg after me—down to walk a little, and wequethed me to hold hith wibbon. Beautiful wibbon it wath, about a yard, a yard and a half or two yards long; and it matched her pwetty dweth' and the color of the dawg perfectly. I wath weally pwoud of the honor th'e conferred upon

me. No other fellah I know hath ever led her dawg, bah Jove!

"Well, aw—we went on for thome time, I leading the dawg, and I can't begin to tell you how happy I wath, when all of a thudden a big bwute of a dawg spwung out and bawked weal loud, and almotht fwightened poor little Claude into fith. I wath weal angwy, I tell you, and thook my cane and thouted, 'Boo! go way!' But I couldn't thcare the big dawg a bit, and the frht thing I knew he gwabbed the wibbon out of my hand and wan away down the avenue ath fatht ath ever he could go, dwagging poor little Claude along with him. It wath twuly tewwible!"

The detective had all he could do to keep from laughing, and hastened to say:

"I see, I see. There was a moment of great confusion; a crowd quickly collected; some ras-eal took advantage of the excitement and snatched the lady's diamonds away; and you want me to recover them. Am I not right?"

The dude looked at the detective in amazement.

"The diamonth be demm'd!" he ejaculated. "The diamonth ith all wight; I want you to wecover the dawg."

This was a crusher.

"You thee," the young man hastily added, "I am wethponthible for the loth of that dawg, and if I cannot wecover it I can never hope to win Mith De Thmythe for my wife. And that ith the weathon why I come to you. I want you to wethore dear little Claude to me, wibbon and all, tho that I can weturn him to the lady I love, and athk her to become mine. I—"

"Pardon me," the detective interrupted, "but while I handle cases of almost every kind, I must draw the line at dogs. I cannot engage to recover your little namesake."

"Aw-w—what!" E. Claude gasped; "do you mean to wefuth me?"

"I certainly must, sir. I cannot help you any." And as he spoke, the detective turned and busied himself with the papers upon his desk, thus closing the interview.

The dude rose up, trembling with rage, and backed toward the door.

"Aw—all wight," he gasped, "all wight, Gilbert; sowwy I twoubled you and wathted my time. I am, bah Jove! I took you for a de-thent thort of fellah," opening the door and backing out of the room as he spoke; "I did, weally; but I wath mithtaken. You're a cad, thir, a deuthed cad!"

And with this courteous adieu, E. Claude Montpensier shut the door with a bang and hastened away, leaving the detective convulsed with laughter.

CHAPTER IX.

CLARENCE AND EFFIE.

THE Dillingsworth residence, at No. — Fifth avenue was a stately mansion.

It had been built by old Ezra Dillingsworth, had descended by will to his son Charles, and was now owned by the latter's son—Clarence Dillingsworth.

It was one of the finest houses in that neighborhood.

Its present owner, Clarence Dillingsworth, was a young man of twenty-four, tall and finely formed. His face was decidedly a handsome one, its every feature being clear-cut and regular, and its expression remarkably intelligent. His clear, blue eyes were very keen and penetrating, and a wealth of curly, light-brown hair crowned his head.

His sister, Effie, two years younger than he, was a remarkably pretty young lady. She was, too, a marvel of grace and wit. She was a trifle above the medium height, had a charming figure, a perfect complexion, and large, dark eyes that glittered like diamonds. It was hard at first to decide whether to class her as a blonde or a brunette, but the decision generally favored the former.

On the morning of which we write these two met in the handsomely furnished drawing-room of their home.

"Good-morning, Effie," said Clarence, as he entered the room. "Did you want to see me?"

"Yes; I told Jones to inform you when you came in."

"He did so. What do you want?"

"I want to speak to you about Uncle Edmund."

"Very well," taking a seat near his pretty sister, "what about him? Has he had another of his peculiar turns?"

"Not that I know of; but you know he acted very strangely at breakfast, and he went out almost immediately after he was through."

"Do you know where he went to?"

"No; and that is why I am anxious about him. You know his mind seems to be failing, and we cannot tell at what moment it will give way entirely."

"That is true, and I feel very much concerned about him too."

"And that is why I wanted to see you. I want to consult with you as to what is to be done."

"I have asked myself that question a hundred times."

"And so have I. And now it seems to me that something must be done, and that at once."

"I fully agree with you; in fact, there is no room for argument. I am fully aware that we must do something."

"But what?"

"That is the question."

"How will it do for us to consult with Uncle Boniface and ask his advice?"

"I think it is about the best thing we can do, under the circumstances."

"And so do I."

"When shall it be?"

"The sooner the better."

"And so I think. No doubt he will call here to-day, or certainly to-morrow."

"And what about having Uncle Edmund examined by expert physicians?"

"It would be a good thing, but would he consent to it?"

"I fear not."

"You know he is so very sensitive about his misfortune, and so long as he does not become violent I hate to have such a step taken."

"But the doctors might be able to discover the trouble and arrest it before it becomes bad. They may be able to cure him."

"That is so, and we must see Uncle Boniface about it. He will give us good advice you may be sure."

"There is something I have been thinking of."

"What is that?"

"How would it do to induce uncle to have a companion—a valet?"

"It would be an excellent thing," Clarence declared, "but he would never agree to it."

"I am not so sure about that," Effie argued. "He is fully aware of his condition, and if we could manage the thing a little skillfully, we might lead him to propose that very thing himself."

"It is possible, though I doubt it very much."

"We agree perfectly, though, that something must be done."

"Yes; and we agree that our best first step is to consult with Uncle Boniface. He loves Uncle Edmund with more than brotherly love, if possible, and you may be sure he will advise no move that is not for the best."

"You are right, so that point is settled."

"Did you want to see me about any other matter?" Clarence asked.

"No," Effie replied, "that was all."

"Well, we will attend to it as soon as we can. By the way, I saw Julian Gladstone last night."

Effie's face instantly colored a little, a pretty rose-blush color, and she leaned back in the large, wide-armed chair in which she sat in order to be more in the shadow.

"Yes?" she responded, quietly, with the peculiar questioning inflection sometimes given to that word.

"Yes; and he was particular to inquire about you."

"That was kind."

"Of course it was. And he takes a decided interest in you, too."

"Does he?"

"You know he does."

"How should I know it?"

"Well, because I have just told you so, if for no other reason; and now, Ef., see here: What do you think of him?"

"Of whom?"

"Why, of Julian, of course."

"Oh! I like him very well."

"Is that all?"

"Is that all! To be sure it is."

"Well, then, let me tell you that he loves you, and in my opinion you will never meet a man more worthy of your love in return. He is rich, educated, of good family, good-looking, and the very soul of honor."

The blushes upon the young lady's face deepened.

"Then you want to marry me off to put me out of the way, eh?" she questioned, laughingly. "Perhaps you desire to make room here for some one who will be a little nearer and dearer to you than a sister."

"You know what I mean, and no use to try to turn it off that way. I know Julian well, and am giving you a brotherly 'tip,' to use the popular word."

"Thank you for your interest in me, but it was unnecessary. I have no intention of marrying at present."

"Perhaps, though, your affections incline in another direction."

"I assure you they do not. That is, I have been able to retain them to myself thus far."

"It may be that Alexis Knight has been more successful than Julian, and has captured the citadel."

This was said in a half-jesting tone, but Effie's face became serious in an instant.

"Since you are inclined to give me some brotherly advice," she said, "pray give me a little more."

"Do you speak in earnest?"

"I do."

"Well, what is the point upon which you want my advice?"

"It is regarding Alexis Knight."

"And what about him?"

"What do you think of him?"

"How do you mean?"

"His character."

"Oh! he seems to be all right, as indeed he must be to retain his hold upon Uncle Boniface's regard. I know nothing against him."

"How do you like him?"

"Very well."

"As well as you do Julian Gladstone?"

"No, decidedly."

"And why?"

"Well, as you would say—for want of a better reason, because I don't. It may be that it is because I have not known him so long, and have had less opportunity to become as well acquainted with him. But, why do you ask? And what advice can I give you?"

"I will tell you. I ask because Uncle Boniface has several times mentioned Mr. Knight to me, and in a way that shows it would please him to have me become his wife."

"I suspected as much."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"What made you suspect it?"

"Oh! one thing and another; I could plainly see that the wind was blowing in that direction."

"And that is the point upon which I want your advice."

"Whether or not to follow the wishes of Uncle Boniface, and marry Knight?"

"Yes."

"Well, before I can answer that, I must ask some questions."

"All right, ask what you will."

"Do you love him, then? to begin with."

"I do not."

"One point against him, then, to start with. Do you think you could learn to love him if you tried?"

"No. There is something about him which seems to repulse rather than attract. I cannot explain what it is."

"Two points against him, I guess you need no advice in the matter, sister mine."

"Oh! but I do. Uncle Boniface has next to requested me to receive the attentions of Mr. Knight, and I do not like to displease him without good reason. He is so good and kind, and no doubt knows best. Shall I obey him?"

"No. In so important a step obey only your own heart, unless it can be proven to you that the object of your devotion is unworthy of you."

"Thank you, Clarence."

"Now if uncle were to advise you to receive the attentions of Julian Gladstone, I would urge you to do so; but in the case of Knight I cannot support him."

Again the rose-color came to Effie's cheeks.

"On the contrary," she returned, "he is inclined to speak rather disparagingly of Julian."

"Can it be possible?"

"His preference is for Knight, most decidedly."

"That is no reason why he should say aught against Julian," exclaimed Clarence, warmly. "I do not see how he can. What does he say?"

"He has charged nothing against him, openly, but in a general way has let me see that he thinks Alexis the better of the two."

"I cannot understand it at all."

"Anyhow, I am glad you support me in my view, Clarence, for I must tell uncle that Mr. Knight need not entertain hopes of winning me."

"Perfectly right, if you have no regard for the gentleman."

"I have a friendly regard for him, but nothing more."

"And for my friend Julian?"

"I have the same regard for him."

"And nothing more?"

"Why do you persist in forcing his name before me?"

"Because, as I have said before, he loves you, and is entirely worthy of you in every way. Nothing would please me so well as to have him for my brother-in-law. Still, in so important a matter you must obey your heart. I shall say nothing more about it. I have told you Julian loves you, and he must plead his own cause."

Effie was about to reply, when, happening to glance from the window, she beheld Father Boniface and Alexis Knight approaching the house.

"See!" she exclaimed, "here come Uncle Boniface and Mr. Knight, now!"

CHAPTER X.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

In a few moments Boniface and Alexis were shown into the room.

Effie rose and greeted her uncle with a kiss, and then extended her hand to Knight, who pressed a kiss upon it.

The hand was quickly, but not rudely, withdrawn.

Then the callers greeted Clarence.

Boniface was a frequent caller at the old residence, and was perfectly at home there, always entering unannounced, unless, as in the present instance, he brought a friend with him.

"We were just speaking about you, uncle,"

remarked Effie, when greetings had been exchanged and the callers seated.

"About me?" Boniface questioned, lifting his brows with a little show of surprise.

"Yes," Clarence confirmed, "and were hoping you would call to see us to-day."

"Then I am glad I have done so. Allow me to inquire, if I may, why I was in your thoughts, and why you desired to see me."

"We were speaking about Uncle Edmund, and wanted to consult with you regarding him," Clarence explained.

"Ah! yes, I see. Poor Edmund! I have noticed lately that his mind is growing weak, and I fear he is becoming insane. I spoke about it to Alexis on our way here."

"Quite true," Knight agreed.

"You will pardon us, Mr. Knight," Effie apologized, "for bringing this matter up in your presence, but it is really necessary that we should consult with Uncle Boniface."

"Do not mind Alexis," Boniface hastened to say, "but rather consider him as one of us. He was deeply moved when I told him of my fears concerning Edmund, for whom he has taken a strong liking."

"That is true," Knight affirmed; "and if I can be of service to you in any way, do not hesitate to command me."

"Thank you," remarked Clarence; "you may be able to suggest something to help us."

"I only hope I may be."

"What conclusion have you arrived at?" inquired Boniface. "You have evidently been debating the question between you."

Effie looked to Clarence for the reply, but he left it to her to explain.

"We have arrived at no conclusion," she declared, "further than having agreed that something ought to be done, and that at once. We want to leave it to you to suggest what shall be done. Poor Uncle Edmund is clearly growing worse day by day."

"Quite true, quite true," Boniface repeated, in a low tone, as he rubbed his fat chin and appeared very thoughtful; "something must be done."

"What do you think of calling a council of able physicians?" asked Clarence.

"Just what I was thinking about," Boniface declared. "But I do not think well of the plan, at least, not at present. We should have to consult Edmund about it, and gain his consent, and the shock it would give him might only serve to make him worse. He seems to be very sensitive—in truth he is so—about his condition, and it would be better to draw his mind away from it rather than toward it. Do you not think so yourself?"

"There is certainly something in that," Clarence owned.

"But," Effie debated, "could not such a consultation be had without his consent—or even his knowledge?"

"Not with any degree of success," Boniface answered. "It would be necessary for them to spend some time in his company, in order to study the case thoroughly."

"That seems quite reasonable," Alexis Knight coincided.

"Then," Clarence reflected, "how would it do to call our family doctor, and have him advise us?"

"I have already asked his opinion," Boniface averred.

"And what does he say?" Effie quickly inquired.

"Well, he was not very decided in his advice," Boniface answered, "but hinted that a change of scene, and a few weeks of rest in some quiet retreat might bring about a change for the better."

This was true. Boniface had, a day or two previously, called upon the old family doctor, and drawn that opinion from him. Instead of its being original with the doctor, however, it had been suggested by Boniface, and the doctor had agreed that it 'might' work a change, perhaps for the better.

"There is the key to the puzzle, I certainly believe!" exclaimed Knight.

"It is certainly a good idea," Clarence agreed.

"But," reasoned Effie, "where can he find a more quiet retreat than his own home?"

"You forget that it was to be a change of scene as well as rest and quiet," Boniface reminded.

"Oh! true enough."

"But where is such a place to be found?" questioned Clarence. "We do not want him sent to an asylum, if it can be avoided, and that would require the objectionable council of doctors."

"I can offer a suggestion," Boniface observed, "but you must understand that it is only a suggestion. I do not mean to advise it, nor do I intend to vote for or against it. I merely mention it."

"What is it?" Clarence and Effie both eagerly asked.

"It is this: If Edmund can be induced to accept my offer, he is welcome to come to the friary of the New Order of the Occident and remain as long as he will. There he will be sure to find rest and quiet, and it will be a change of scene, too. He will receive the best of care, and

will be allowed the freedom of our house and grounds."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Knight. "Pardon me," he added, "but I cannot help showing the interest I feel in your unfortunate uncle."

"There is certainly nothing to pardon," assured Clarence. "I, too, think the plan an excellent one. What do you say, Effie?"

"I think it is a good idea. It is certainly much better than sending him to an asylum, even if that could be done without alarming him. But that is not yet necessary, and I hope it never may be."

"So hope we all," supplemented Boniface, reverently.

"But how are we to broach the subject to him?" inquired Clarence.

"You are agreed, then, that our retreat would be a good place for him?" the wily pretender interrogated.

"Yes; but whether we can induce him to go there for a time is the question."

It was Clarence who answered.

"I cannot think of a better plan," declared Effie; "but I, too, cannot see how we can ever get Uncle Edmund to consent to go there. It seems almost impossible to mention it to him without revealing our whole object. It is but little less objectionable than the council of doctors."

"I believe I can manage it, if it is your desire that I should," Boniface announced.

"We desire to do whatever you think is for the best," Effie rejoined.

"Well, I certainly think that will be for the best. He will be well-cared for, I will see to that myself; will have rest and quiet, and, I hope, will come away entirely recovered. If not, if there is no sign for the better after a reasonable length of time, then we must have recourse to the council of doctors."

"I think the plan is the best we can hit upon at present," said Clarence, "so we put the matter into your hands."

"Very well," responded Boniface, his eyes burning with inward satisfaction. "I will do the best I can. But, by the way," he added, "where is Edmund this morning?"

"He went out shortly after breakfast," explained Clarence, "and has not yet returned."

"Did not say where he was going, I suppose?"

"No."

"Come to think of it," said Knight, "I believe I saw him going in the direction of Mr. Goldsmith's residence when I came up."

"Did he know you?" queried Boniface.

"I think he did not see me," Knight replied.

"I was on the other side of the street."

"Did he seem to be excited?"

"No, not particularly so; but he was walking at quite a lively pace."

"No doubt, then, one of his spells was coming on. It is too bad, too bad."

Knight had mentioned seeing the old gentleman, for want of something to say.

His story was far different this time from what he had told Boniface only a short time previously.

"Another idea that came to us," remarked Effie, "was to try and induce Uncle Edmund to have a companion, or valet. What do you think of that?"

"If he comes to our retreat he will not need one," Boniface replied.

"No, of course not; but in case he will not go there?"

"In that event it will do to try the plan, I think. But would he not object to it?"

"So we fear; but we hoped to be able to lead him to propose such a plan himself."

"A good idea, that, a very good idea," and Boniface rubbed his fat chin.

A new scheme was hatching in his brain.

He was thinking that in case he could not inveigle Edmund into the "retreat," he might be able to furnish him with a valet of his own choosing.

The plan pleased him.

"Yes," he said aloud, "I like that idea very well. A valet could be with him constantly, and could keep him out of danger at least. The idea of a consultation of doctors, though, with the prospect of incarceration in an asylum, I do not like at all. Instead of startling him by such a proceeding, we should rather notice his affliction as little as possible, and do our best to soothe him. Am I not right? Come, Alexis, what is your opinion?" turning to Knight to draw him out.

"My opinion is the same as yours, sir," Knight replied. "You advance a good argument and have won me over. At first mention of a companion for him I did not quite approve of it. We must give Miss Dillingsworth honor for the plan."

"Was it not you who first spoke of it?" Effie asked, turning to her brother.

"No," Clarence answered, "the idea was yours."

"I thought I was not mistaken in ascribing it to you," Knight said, with a bow and smile.

Effie made no reply.

"Well," meditated Boniface, "I will remain here until Edmund returns, and then I will see what can be done. It is bound to be a delicate

affair to handle, but with your help I hope to make it successful. Our love for him will guide us."

"Perhaps I had better take my departure," proposed Knight, as he rose from his chair.

"My presence may prove a drawback."

"By no means!" exclaimed Boniface. "Please do us the favor to remain. Am I not right, Effie?"

Effie could make but one reply, under the circumstances.

"Certainly," she said; "pray sit down again, Mr. Knight."

Boniface, then, formed a plan to leave Knight and Effie to entertain each other for awhile.

Turning to Clarence, he said:

"By the way, Clarence, if we may be excused, I would like to see you in the library. You will excuse us?" turning to Effie.

Again she had no choice but to reply as he desired.

Before he and Clarence could go out, however, hasty steps sounded in the hall, and Edmund Dillingsworth burst into the room.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPELL IS BROKEN.

THE poor old gentleman was a picture of misery.

He was perspiring from every pore, was almost out of breath, and had evidently been walking very fast—perhaps running.

The moment he entered the room he glanced around, and seeing Boniface, ran to him with hands outstretched.

"H—here I am," he gasped.

Boniface took his hands, gently, and led him to a seat, and Effie quickly removed his hat and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Be calm, Edmund, be calm," said Boniface, soothingly; "you are in no danger now."

The old gentleman seemed for a moment to be trying hard to resist his brother's will, but his resistance was soon overcome, and he leaned back in his chair and became quiet and passive.

"Where have you been, uncle?" asked Effie, anxiously, as she fanned him.

For a moment the old gentleman made no reply.

When he did speak it was like one speaking mechanically. His words were without spirit or assent. He was like an automaton more than like a human being. But he was now entirely unlike the automaton we have seen before, in the detective's office. Here he was under the complete control of the mesmerist's will.

"I have been out for a walk," was his reply to Effie's question, spoken, as said, without spirit or inflection. It might have been a declaration or a question, either or neither, for all the modulation that was given it.

Effie, Clarence, and Boniface looked at one another.

It seemed clear, to the brother and sister certainly, that the old gentleman was growing worse.

As for Alexis Knight, he could only look on in surprise—surprise occasioned by Boniface's wonderful magnetic power.

"Where did you walk to?" inquired Clarence.

Again there was a momentary pause before the reply.

Then came the answer:

"Only a short distance—short distance."

"But why have you hurried so? See, you are wet with perspiration."

Again the pause, and then the spiritless response:

"I—I didn't want—to—to be late."

"Late for what, uncle?" queried Effie.

"To see Boniface," was the instant reply.

This time, evidently, the question came so quickly that the mesmerist had no time to exert his influence to direct the answer.

Perhaps, too, he was a little relax just at that instant, and left Edmund partly free to speak.

The answer was certainly given with more spirit.

"How strangely he talks!" whispered Effie, in exclamation.

"Wonderfully," agreed Clarence.

"My dear children," said Boniface, reverently, "this is indeed sad, and I fear the worst—that his reason is all but gone."

This was said in a low tone.

"And what are we to do—oh! what are we to do?" implored Effie.

"That is the all-important question now," added Clarence.

"You seem to forget that we have just decided what to do, or what to try to do, at least," corrected Boniface.

"True, true," from Effie.

"For the present," Boniface hastened to advise, "let him rest. He has evidently been walking terribly fast, and is almost exhausted. When he has rested a little I will talk with him."

"I think that is about the best thing to do," agreed Knight, quickly.

"Unless we send at once for a doctor," suggested Clarence.

"Which I do not think is necessary," Boniface hastened to object. "He is over his excitement now, and is quite calm. Evidently he is

returning to his right mind again. At any rate let us wait and see."

"Yes, since Uncle Boniface advises it," Effie coincided, "let us wait."

Nothing more was said for some minutes.

Effie continued to fan the old gentleman, while Boniface sat and rubbed his fat chin and seemed to be deeply buried in thought.

After a time Clarence and Alexis exchanged a few remarks, for the most part queries put by the latter, for Clarence did not seem inclined to talk a great deal.

Gradually Mr. Dillingsworth grew cooler, and after a time his excitement seemed to be all gone.

Presently Boniface leaned toward him and inquired:

"Edmund, do you know me?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Who am I?"

"You are Boniface."

"And who is this?"

"She is Effie."

"I am glad you can recognize us. How do you feel?"

"I feel well, but tired."

"You have been out in the heat of the sun, and I fear it made you ill."

"Have I been ill?"

"Yes."

"Very long?"

"No, only a little while."

"Then I shall soon be all right."

"Yes, I think so. It was no doubt the heat that caused it."

"I do not remember going out."

"No?"

"No."

"You did, and came home quite ill. But you will soon be all right now. You must be more careful."

"I will."

"You know you have not been well of late, and you should be cautious."

"Not been well?"

"No. In fact you have been ailing for some time."

"I was not aware of it."

"Is it not so, Effie?"

"Yes, uncle, it is true," the young lady confirmed.

"And, Edmund," Boniface continued, "I have been thinking that perhaps a change of scene, in some place where you could find perfect seclusion, safety, comfort, and rest would do you good."

"It might."

"And so think Effie and Clarence."

"Do they?"

"Yes; is it not so, my children?"

"It is true," Effie owned; and her brother added:

"Yes, Uncle Edmund, we think it would do you good. You certainly are not well, and Uncle Boniface says the doctor thinks you need rest."

"Does he?"

The old gentlemen's sentences were very brief, and were uttered as though he did not really understand half what was being said.

And little wonder, since he was only acting according to his evil-minded brother's will.

When Clarence mentioned the doctor Boniface frowned.

He did not want to have any mention made of doctors.

No doubt he had his reasons.

Now that it was mentioned, however, he had to accept it, though he quickly disposed of it.

"Yes," he said, "and we have hit upon the very place for you."

"Yes?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Yes," repeated Edmund again.

"Evidently he means to ask where," Boniface remarked aside; and then to his brother he said:

"Yes, the very place for you. There you will have a change of scene, as well as quiet and rest."

"That is right."

Peculiar replies, certainly.

"Yes; and in a short time you will come home as good as new."

"Yes."

"You see you are run down, and that is just what you need to build you up again."

"I suppose so."

"How would you like to stay with me for a few days at our retreat?"

"I—I should like that."

"And will you come?"

"Y-yes."

"When?"

"I suppose so."

"No, no; I say when would you like to come?"

"Yes."

Boniface looked decidedly vexed.

These meaningless replies to his questions did not please him at all.

He fixed his mind yet more fully upon his subject, and demanded once more:

"When would you like to come?"

"Come where?" asked Edmund.

"To visit me."

"Oh!"

"You know we were talking about you," Boniface explained deliberately, with his eyes fixed upon those of the old gentleman; "we think you need a change of scene, and a few days of perfect quiet and repose. I have just invited you to come and spend a few days with me, and you have agreed to do so. Now I ask when you would like to come. Will you come to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Ah! very well. I will call for you, then, in the forenoon."

"All right."

"In the mean time you must not change your mind."

"No."

Boniface turned to Clarence, then, and in a lower tone remarked:

"You see we have carried our point. Poor Edmund realizes his sad condition, and is no doubt glad to accept my offer."

"Yes, he seems perfectly willing to go, if he does not change his mind before to-morrow."

"I do not think he will."

"I hope he will not, at any rate, for I think as you do that the change will do him good."

"It undoubtedly will, I am satisfied. See! he is falling asleep."

Effie was still fanning him, and he seemed indeed to be dropping into a peaceful nap.

In truth he was only obeying the will of the mesmerist.

"Had we not better remove him to his room and place him in bed?" inquired Clarence.

"I would not do so," advised Boniface. "It would only break his sleep, and he might not be able to drop off again. Better leave him right where he is until he awakes."

"I think so, too," agreed Effie, "and I will stay right here and fan him."

"Well," announced Boniface, "I will go, as I have other calls to make. You may have Edmund ready to-morrow, if he does not change his mind, and I will come for him."

"Yes, we will do our part," Clarence promised, "and I earnestly hope we are doing what is for the best."

"As I believe we are," Boniface solemnly declared.

Knight, too, rose to go, and after a few more remarks they took their leave.

"Well, what do you think?" inquired Boniface, when they were some distance from the house.

"I am inclined to believe you are the very Prince of Darkness," Alexis answered.

Boniface smiled.

"I have but begun," he declared; "but I tell you again as I told you before, the Dillingsworth worth millions shall be ours!"

"I hope so, certainly. But will not the old party come to, and back out of his—"

"Ha, ha, ha! just what I expected you would ask! No, he will not come to until I have him safely caged. I intend to remain awake all night in order to hold him where I have placed him."

Just then they started to cross the street, when they heard loud shouting behind them.

"Hi there!" "Look out!" "Look out!" were the cries, and they paused for an instant in a state of bewilderment.

The next moment a team of runaway horses was upon them, Father Boniface was thrown to the ground and rendered insensible, and Knight narrowly escaped being killed.

At that moment, too, the moment when Boniface became unconscious, Edmund Dillingsworth returned instantly to full vigor of both mind and body.

CHAPTER XII.

A FAVORED PROPOSITION.

CLARENCE DILLINGSWORTH and Effie were conversing in low tones, while the latter continued to fan their uncle Edmund.

Suddenly the old gentleman opened his eyes, and sitting bolt upright in his chair looked from one to the other in evident surprise.

"What has happened?" he demanded. "How came I here?"

"You have been ill," Clarence explained in gentle tones. "You went out for a walk, and were evidently overcome by the heat of the sun."

"But how came I here?"

"You returned a short time ago," said Effie.

"How strangely tired I feel," the old gentleman mused as he stood up and stretched his limbs. "And I declare I am damp with perspiration, too. What can I have been doing?"

"No doubt you walked faster than you should have done," Clarence hinted.

"No, no, that cannot be," Edmund protested; "I never walk fast, and I seldom walk where I can ride, anyhow."

"Where did you go when you went out?" inquired Effie. "Perhaps we can assist you to remember where you have been. We are satisfied that you have had a narrow escape from sunstroke."

This was perhaps a trifling fib, for both she and Clarence ascribed it all to his failing mental power, as they supposed it was; but since her Uncle Boniface had used it, and he so good

and pious a man, she felt no compunction in doing the same.

"Let me see," the old gentleman reflected, "where did I go?"

"Was it to Mr. Goldsmith's?" Effie inquired, remembering that Alexis Knight had seen him going in that direction.

"To Burton's?" Edmund repeated; "to Burton's? Yes, so I did; and from there I went down to— Yes, now I see it all. I must have walked all the way home. Did I? Yes, yes, now I know I did. I ran, too, some of the way. Oh! this is terrible, terrible!"

"What is terrible, uncle?" asked Clarence, earnestly.

"You shall know all in good time, my boy, all in good time. And you, too, pretty one," to Effie.

"Do you feel better now?" Effie inquired solicitously.

"I feel all right," was the reply, "only I am tired. But, tell me, was Boniface here when I came in?"

"Yes; he went away only a few minutes ago."

"Yes, yes; now I remember. It will all come back to me presently. It is terrible, terrible. I know what I do, but I am powerless to resist doing it. I know what I say, and am powerless to say what I want to. Oh! it is frightful; and he will drive me mad—mad!"

Clarence and Effie looked at each other in alarm.

"Who will drive you mad, uncle?" Clarence asked. "Pray tell us what you mean."

"No, not now, not now."

"And why not now?"

"You would not believe me."

"Not believe you!" exclaimed Effie.

"No, you would not."

"And why?"

"Because you would believe me mad indeed."

The brother and sister were sorely puzzled.

"What could all this mean?"

"Have you an enemy?" questioned Clarence.

"Yes, I have an enemy," sorrowfully.

"And you will not tell us who it is?"

"No, I cannot, cannot. It would be of no use. You would think me crazy then beyond a doubt."

"I assure you we would believe you, Uncle Edmund," Effie protested, "and—"

"No, my child, I know you would not, so do not press me. In good time you shall know all."

There was a moment of silence, and then the old gentleman spoke again.

"My children," he said, "you know that I love you, do you not?"

"No need to ask us that," they instantly replied.

"And I know that you love me."

"We do indeed."

"Then will you answer a simple question, and answer it truthfully?"

"How can you doubt it?" exclaimed Effie.

"You know we will."

"I do not doubt you. If you answer it at all, I know it will be truthfully. What I mean is, will you answer it straightforwardly, and not attempt to avoid it?"

"We will."

"Very well, then, the question is this: Do you believe that I am going insane?"

There was an awkward pause.

After a moment of hesitation, though, Clarence replied:

"Uncle Edmund, we promised to give you a straightforward and truthful answer to your question, and we will. I speak for Effie as well as for myself. For some time past we and others, too, have noticed a change in you. At times your mind seems to wander, and you act very unlike your usual self. We did not like to speak to you about it, but it has caused us a great deal of anxiety. We feared that you were indeed becoming insane."

"Thank you; I knew you would be frank with me. And now, believe me if you can: I am no more insane than either of you."

"Then what is the cause of—"

"Of my strange actions, Effie? I will tell you. It is because my enemy has a power over me which I cannot resist. He can influence me to obey his will instead of my own. But, enough of this; for even were I to tell you all, you would not—could not—believe it. You would set it down as proof positive that I am insane."

"I assure you, uncle," Clarence began, but he was interrupted.

"No, no, Clarence," the old gentleman counseled, "do not protest. I know it would be impossible. And let me request you not to mention to any one what I have said. Not even Boniface."

"Very well, we promise."

"And now let me ask you a few more questions."

"Certainly; all you will."

"First, then, am I, think you, in my right mind at this moment?"

"I think you are," Clarence replied; and Effie agreed with him.

"You are right," their uncle avowed. "At this moment I am completely myself. In truth,

I have not felt so free, mentally, in a long time."

"And you must strive to remain so," remarked Effie.

"It is not in my power," the uncle returned, sadly. "And that reminds me that I must hasten with what I have to say. The spell may be cast over me again at any moment. Now, if I continue to grow worse instead of better, what is it your intention to do with me? Speak frankly, now."

"We do not know," Clarence confessed.

"You do not know?"

"No."

"Perhaps you will send me to some asylum."

"That, sir, will be the last measure thought of. In no case shall you be sent to an asylum unless you become really insane, and are so pronounced by expert physicians. And even then you shall remain here, unless you should become raving mad. You see I am speaking as you requested—frankly."

"Thank you, my boy, thank you," the old gentleman faltered.

"You may be sure you shall be cared for," declared Effie.

"I do not doubt it. But, let me hasten with my questions, while I am permitted to enjoy my own will. What do you think of my employing a valet, a man-servant to be with me night and day?"

No proposition could have pleased his two companions more, as their glad faces showed.

"Excellent!" they exclaimed.

"I have partly made up my mind to do so," the uncle added, "but thought I would first mention it to you."

"It is a good idea," declared Clarence. "Then you would be perfectly safe from accident, and would always have a companion. It is a splendid plan."

"Do you think so, too, Effie?"

"Yes, uncle, I do."

"Then the question is settled. Tell me, though, what was Boniface saying about my going to visit him?"

"Why, he invited you to come to his retreat and spend a few days, or weeks, with him."

"And what did I reply?"

"You said you would go."

"Did I say when I would go?"

"Yes; you promised to go to-morrow."

"Boniface is certainly kind to me."

"He is indeed. But, then, why should he not be?"

"No reason whatever. But I have now changed my mind about going there. I shall remain here."

"Of course you may do as you like about it, uncle. Here is your home, and, after all, there is no place like home."

"You are right, little one, and here I shall remain. I will thank Boniface for his kindly offer, but I know I would not feel at home there. No, I shall hire a companion instead, and remain right here."

"Which, to tell the truth," declared Effie, "pleases us a great deal better."

"Can you recall yet where you went to when you were out?" asked Clarence.

"Yes, it has all come back to me, all but one little space that puzzles me; but you will pardon me if I do not tell you any more now. Believe me, I am now all right, am perfectly sane, and know perfectly well what I am saying and doing."

"We can see that."

"Permit me, then, to go to my room; and please send a servant up to me, if you will."

"Certainly, uncle."

The old gentleman left the room, then, and went up-stairs.

Clarence and Effie looked at each other, the moment the door closed after him each seemingly trying to read what the other thought.

Effie spoke first.

"Clarence, what do you think?" she asked.

"I do not know what to think," the young man answered. "He is now either completely sane or wholly insane. Which is it?"

"I am inclined to believe him sane. His suggestion about hiring a valet, or companion, was certainly sensible enough."

"Yes, you are right, there; but his declaration that he has an enemy who is master of his will-power, is simply incomprehensible."

"It is, indeed; and yet he seems to act and talk perfectly rationally, too."

"I cannot account for it. But, you had better send Jones up to see what he wants, had you not?"

"Yes, I will do so at once."

Effie went out, then, and a few moments later the old servant, Jones, went up to Edmund's room, where he found the old gentleman busily engaged at writing.

"You want me, sir?" he questioned.

"Yes," was the reply; "I want you to send for a messenger boy to come here immediately."

The servant bowed and withdrew, and ten minutes later a uniformed messenger was on hand.

Mr. Dillingsworth took him into his room, where he detained him for some minutes, and when the boy reappeared he had a letter in his hand.

Clarence was waiting in the lower hall, to learn where the boy was going, but he was disappointed.

"We don't tell no tales," the boy exclaimed when he accosted him, and before he could address him again he was gone.

The letter which the boy carried was addressed to Nathan Gilbert, the detective.

CHAPTER XIII.

PREPARING TO TAKE THE TRAIL.

GILBERT of Gotham, as has been said, laughed heartily after the departure from his office of Mr. E. Claude Montpensier.

The dude was about the most peculiar character it had been his fortune to run across for some time.

The detective had in his employ a young man named McQueen, one of whose favorite character make-ups was that of "la dude," as he called it.

"I wish McQueen could have been here," the detective muttered; "he could have gained some points for 'la dude,' I feel certain."

Again he laughed.

"Well," he mused, as he dismissed the incident from his mind, "E. Claude And-the-rest-of-it is a lamb for somebody to fleece, and I have no doubt he can find some one who will undertake to do it, if he looks far enough."

A few minutes later one of the attaches of the office came in to make his report on a case he had in hand, and the dude and his dog were quickly forgotten.

When that was done with, then Gilbert wrote a note to the Mrs. Clementine, one of his female detectives, who was to take up the case of Miss Goldsmith's stolen diamonds, giving her the particulars of the affair and directing her how to proceed.

By the time that letter was written, and forwarded by a messenger, the tall man in black returned to report the result of his following Mr. Dillingsworth.

"Well, Johns," Gilbert inquired, "what luck had you?"

"Good luck, I guess," was the reply.

"You followed him home, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where did you leave him?"

"At No. — Fifth avenue."

"Right; that is where he resides."

"You knew, then, where he would go?"

"No; I learned since you went out where he lives."

"In the Directory, I suppose."

"No doubt his name and address are there, but I did not get the information from that source."

"How then? Pardon me, but you know how eager I am for details."

"Especially when you're on a case, eh? Yes, I know your weakness, and always like to humor you. I got my information from a young lady who called here shortly after you went out."

"Young lady, eh? Strange the young ladies never come around when I am at home."

"Too bad, really; but I intend to give you a chance now to entertain all who call."

"Going out?"

"I'm going out for an unknown length of time."

"Ha! what is in the wind?"

"I have been forced—I may say—into taking a peculiar case on condition that I will attend to it personally."

"Whew!"

"Just so; and I want you to take my place here."

"You honor me, Gilbert."

"I look upon it as imposing upon you, rather; but I will make that all right, or shall try to at least."

"And I will do my best to serve you well."

"I have no doubt of that."

"And what is this great case you have taken hold of?"

"It concerns the old gentleman whom you followed home."

"Him?"

"Yes."

"Why, he is as crazy as a loon!"

"Crazy?"

"Yes."

"What gives you that idea?"

"Haven't I got eyes?"

"That don't answer the question."

"Well, I judge by his actions, that is all."

"What has he done?"

"Why, instead of riding up-town, as any sane man would, he went every step of the way on foot."

"On foot! You do not mean to tell me that he walked all the way from here to his Fifth avenue residence, do you?"

"That is just it. And not only did he go on foot, but he actually ran a good share of the distance."

"You surprise me."

"It surprised me, I can tell you."

"Tell me all that happened."

"All right. When you summoned me in from the other room—"

"Hold on. Did you not hear at least some of the conversation I had with the old gentleman before I called you?"

"No; you did not signal for me to listen, and as I was busy I paid no attention to it. I could hear your voices, but as the slides in the book-case were closed, I could not catch any words."

"Go on."

"Well, when I came in by way of the book-case door, as your two taps of the bell signaled me to do, I found you alone."

"Follow the old gentleman who just left this room," you ordered; "see that no harm comes to him on the way; and come back at once and let me know where he goes. Follow him home."

"I hastened away at once."

"The old gentleman was just going down the stairs when I first sighted him, and I did not lose sight of him again."

"I had no idea at first, though, that I was following a lunatic; but now I can see that you knew it—or at least suspected something of the kind."

"How can you see that?"

"Why, your telling me to see that no harm came to him, shows that you knew something was wrong and had reason to think something might happen to him."

"A good point, Johns; go on."

"He started off up Broadway at a lively pace, and the further he went the faster he walked. He seemed to be walking against time, and I wondered why he did not take a stage. He seemed to have only one thought—to reach some point as speedily as possible, and he plunged straight ahead, running into about every fifth or sixth person he met."

"I soon began to suspect that his mental machine was unhinged, and when he began to run I felt sure of it."

"In front of one of the hotels I got a cab, and telling the driver to keep my man in sight, the rest of my way was easy."

"I can't understand how the old gentleman kept it up so well, for it would have fagged me out completely; but he did, and walked and ran the whole distance from here to the place where I left him."

"Further proof that his strange story is true, if further proof were wanting," Gilbert mused.

"What story?" demanded Johns.

"The story the old gentleman told me."

"You said that much."

"Oh! did I?"

It will be seen that Detective Johns was more like a partner than employee. Gilbert had the utmost confidence in him. He liked, though, to worry him a little when his curiosity became too keen.

"Yes, you did," Johns retorted; "but no matter, it is none of my business, anyhow."

Gilbert laughed.

"Don't be offended," he said. "I shall tell you all in good time, and you may prepare for one of the most peculiar, strange and impossible cases you ever heard of. All I can tell you now is, that old gentleman is no more crazy than you are."

"Not crazy?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Then he is—well, worse than crazy."

"What is that?"

"Foolish."

"No, he is not either, as I firmly believe."

"Then what in wonders caused him to act as he did?"

"You would not believe me if I were to tell you."

"Try me."

"Well, I will. It is because he has not control of his own will-power."

"That is Dutch to me. What do you mean?"

"I mean just this: That old man has an enemy. That enemy is something of a mesmerist, and can make Mr. Dillingsworth do whatever he desires."

"Bosh! Do you mean to tell me one man can control another to such a degree?"

"I do."

"To such an extent as to cause him to go tearing up through Broadway at full speed for three or four miles?"

"You have seen it done?"

"I don't believe it!"

"I told you you wouldn't."

"Why, it is impossible! I am ready to swallow anything within the bounds of reason, but when it comes to a cock and bull story like this, I have to draw the line."

"Just what I knew before I mentioned it to you. I—"

"But, surely you do not take any stock in it, do you?"

"I do; I believe it fully."

"Then I give up."

"And I could bring you to believe it, too," Gilbert added, "if I had time to tell you all about it, which I haven't at present. You will please not mention it."

"Certainly not."

"And when I have time I will give you the whole strange story."

"All right. Since I see you are in earnest, I have no more to say; but it is the strangest thing I ever heard of."

"Same here. I have handled many peculiar

cases, but this one promises to be something out of the usual run."

"And you say you intend to give it your personal attention?"

"Yes; as I said, I want you to take charge of things here, and run the business while I am away."

"I will do the best I can."

"That is all I ask of you."

"And how long do you expect to be out on the case?"

"Impossible to tell. The old gentleman insisted upon my handling it personally, and I confess that when I had heard his story, and what I heard—and saw—afterward, I was anxious to do so."

"It must be a strange case, indeed."

"It is, I assure you. But, let us come to business, and I will proceed to turn everything over into your hands."

For some time, then, they were exceedingly busy.

It was no small task for the chief to turn his whole business over to his man, explaining each particular case so fully that it could be carried on as he desired.

Detective Johns was equal to the occasion, though, and Gilbert had full confidence in him, so there was no need of unnecessary repeating and cautioning.

Johns was, in fact, Gilbert's right-hand man, and it was easier to put him in charge of his affairs than any other of his men.

When all was done, Gilbert issued an order to his other employees to recognize Johns as their chief during his absence, and then he was free to act.

Johns occupied the official chair, and the master had become, of his own volition, the man.

Gilbert was about to leave the office when there came a knock at the door.

It proved to be a messenger boy.

"You Mister Gilbert?" he inquired, addressing Johns.

Johns pointed to his chief.

"I am Gilbert," said the latter; "what do you want?"

"Letter fer ye," answered the boy, as he produced it.

Gilbert took the letter and signed the boy's ticket, saying:

"Wait a moment; I may want to send an answer."

When he had read the missive, however, he saw that no answer was expected, so he allowed the boy to go.

"What's up?" asked Johns.

"It is a letter from your lunatic," the detective chief replied; "and he is the sanest madman I ever saw. I shall go up and see him this afternoon."

A short time later Gilbert left the office and went home.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. DILLINGSWORTH'S PLAN.

SOME time about the middle of the afternoon an old man called at the Dillingsworth residence.

"Is Mr. Edmund Dillingsworth within?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," the servant answered.

"Please to deliver my card, then, and say that I desire to see him at once."

"Yes, sir; please step in, sir."

The old man did so, and the servant, throwing open the door of the reception-room, on the left of the hall, bade him enter and wait.

He had not to wait very long. In a moment the servant returned, with instructions to show the gentleman up to Mr. Dillingsworth's private room.

The card the old man had sent up bore simply the name, "Mr. Gilbert."

The servant led the way up to Mr. Dillingsworth's room, opened the door and bowed the visitor in, and his duty in the matter was at an end.

Mr. Dillingsworth rose to his feet to receive his caller, but the moment his eyes fell upon him a look of surprise and disappointment came over his face.

This was not the man he had expected to see. "Mr. Dillingsworth?" the old man inquired, as he saw the change.

"Yes, sir," Mr. Dillingsworth replied, politely; "and you," glancing at the card he held, "you are Mr. Gilbert?" in a questioning tone.

"I am, sir," was the response.

"Pardon me, Mr. Gilbert," Mr. Dillingsworth then said, "but I fail to recognize you. I was expecting a Mr. Gilbert, and no doubt I showed the surprise I felt when you entered. Where have I had the honor to—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" his visitor laughed, but quite moderately. "I see you fail to recognize me. Allow me—" and, with a quick motion he took a wig of white hair from his head and stood forth confessed as Gilbert of Gotham.

Mr. Dillingsworth was too surprised to speak. "I received your note," the detective added, "and here I am."

"Wonderful, wonderful!" the old gentleman managed to say; "you surprised me very much. I requested you to come here in disguise, but I

never dreamed that I should not be able to recognize you. Sit down, sir, sit down."

"The disguise stood well the test," the detective remarked, as he replaced the wig and sat down. "I thought this would be about as suitable a one as I could adopt for the occasion."

"Yes, I think so. No one in the house can suspect that you are a detective."

"No, I think not."

"Well, Mr. Gilbert, let us come at once to business."

"I am ready, sir. You requested me to come here in disguise as soon as I could, and I have obeyed."

"Yes, and I admire your promptness. I sent for you to come here because I did not feel able to go to your office again to-day, and yet I felt that no time was to be lost. No need for me to repeat the story I told you this morning. Let me add, however, that I am feeling better and more free, mentally, this afternoon, than I have before for a long time, and I wanted to see you again before another spell comes over me."

"I am glad that you feel better, sir," the detective assured, "and I hope you may continue so."

"As that does not depend on me," the old gentleman returned, "the chances are that I shall not. For that reason I must not delay in what I want to say to you."

"Very well, sir, I am all attention."

The detective noticed that the old gentleman seemed far more composed and rational now than he had appeared in the forenoon when at his office. He seemed to be no longer under restraint, but perfectly free.

This the detective could not understand.

"Have you decided whether you will take hold of the case for me or not?" Mr. Dillingsworth inquired.

"I have."

"And your decision is—"

"That I will take it."

"Good! And now allow me to keep my part of the contract and pay a month's salary in advance. Let me see—three hundred dollars was the sum fixed upon, was it not?"

"It was."

"Here, then, please accept it."

The detective took the money, counted it, and gave a receipt.

The old gentleman was about to put the receipt in his pocketbook, but the detective restrained him.

"I would not put that there, he admonished.

"Why not?" was the puzzled inquiry.

"Because it might be seen by some one whom you would not want to know that you have engaged me."

"True enough; I did not think of that. I have a small safe here in this closet, and I will put it in that."

"That will be better."

This was soon done, and then Gilbert remarked:

"You have decided that you want a valet, or man-servant, eh?"

"Yes; as I informed you in my note, such is my decided course, unless you can suggest something better."

"I approve of it, sir. I believe I would have suggested that very thing."

"And are you willing to play such a part, Mr. Gilbert?"

"It is in my line, sir, to play any part, inasmuch as I am always on the side of justice and right. I have played a meaner part than that of valet, in order to gain desired proof against rascals whom I was hunting down."

"I am glad you do not refuse."

"When do you desire to engage this valet?"

"I have decided to advertise for one in tomorrow's papers, and desire you to be one of the applicants."

"A good idea, decidedly! Mr. Dillingsworth, you are twice the man you were this forenoon."

"I know it. As I said, I have not felt so free, mentally, in a long time. I do not understand it, but my mind is in full vigor."

"It is peculiar certainly."

"And you agree to my proposition, do you?"

"Yes, I agree."

"Then that is settled. You see I have mentioned the idea to my nephew and niece, and they approve of it, believing as they do that I am becoming demented. I shall advertise, you will apply for the place and be accepted, and no one can suspect what you are."

"But there will be other applicants, Mr. Dillingsworth, and if you happen to be laboring under one of your fits of alleged insanity when I call—"

"Ah! I see. I will take care of that point. I will request Clarence to have the applicants call again, in case such is the emergency, as I will have no valet but one of my own choosing."

"All right; that settles that point. On my part, I will come armed with a letter that will speak well for me. And now, Mr. Dillingsworth, allow me to repeat a question I had just asked you this morning when your mind was drawn away."

"Certainly; but what was it? I have forgotten all about it."

"I do not wonder. I will repeat it. You

said you wanted me to protect you and your brother's children from the evil designs of your brother Boniface. I asked you how I was to do it, and what you wanted me to do—that is, what steps to take! Now, however, I have a clearer understanding of the case, and those queries are unnecessary. Others, however, were—Can you give me any clue as to the nature of the plot you suspect? or can you give me any points which I can bring to bear against that society?"

"No, sir, I can do neither. You now know fully as much about the case as I do."

"By the way, did you find your brother Boniface awaiting you here when you reached home?"

"Yes; he and a young man named Knight."

"Ah! Knight, eh?"

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"I thought perhaps you did, from the way you exclaimed."

"Who is he?"

"He is a young man in whom Boniface takes a great deal of interest. His father belonged to the Order, and I believe he is about to become a member."

"I thought so."

"You thought so! How could you have any knowledge about him?"

"You will be surprised if I tell you."

"I am willing to be, I assure you."

"I will tell you, then. And I may remark that I have found proof that the strange story you told me this morning is entirely true."

"You have?" in the greatest possible surprise.

"Yes, I have."

"And so soon! How— But you were about to tell me. Pray go on."

"Yes, Mr. Dillingsworth, I believe your story fully. You are no more insane than I am, and I am certain that I am not; and it is a pleasure to converse with you as you are now."

"Thank you; but, go on with your story."

The detective did so.

He recited all that happened in his office, from the time when the old gentleman first lost his self-control of will-power to the time when he left the office so suddenly.

Not one point was overlooked.

Mr. Dillingsworth listened in profound amazement.

He could scarcely believe that he heard aright. When the detective had done, the old gentleman exclaimed:

"I know it! I was certain of it! Do you envy my position, sir? My life is in danger, and if ever I needed protection I need it now. Heavens! but your story is almost enough to turn one's brain. Can it be? Are we not dreaming? I—"

A knock at the door.

"Come in," Mr. Dillingsworth invited.

His nephew Clarence entered.

"Pardon me, uncle," he said, "but I bring sad news."

"Sad news!"

"Yes; uncle Boniface, on his way home, was knocked down by a runaway team, and is lying unconscious."

"Heavens! is he dangerously hurt?"

"The doctor cannot tell yet."

"Where is he?"

"At his retreat."

"This is news indeed. Please go at once and see him, Clarence, and let me know how he is. Or perhaps you have been already?"

"No; I have just received the news. I am going immediately."

"Do so, by all means. Allow me to present you to an old friend; Mr. Nathan this is my nephew."

The introduction was acknowledged, and then Clarence hastened away.

"The secret is out," exclaimed Edmund, the moment he was gone.

"What secret?" asked Gilbert, although he plainly understood.

"Why, the secret of my sudden return to full mental vigor. My brother being unconscious, of course I am free from his influence for the time being."

"You are right, that is certain. And, if his injuries happen to prove fatal, my services will not be required."

"That is true. Did you ever hear of a similar case?"

"I never did, I assure you. And now, with your permission, I will go. In case the worst happens, let me know; and if I do not hear from you I shall come here to-morrow to apply for the place as valet."

"Very well, let it be so understood. What name will you give?"

"Let me see: I guess I will disguise myself as a middle-aged Englishman, and will give my name as— What? James?—yes, David James."

"Very well; and do not fail."

"I shall not. And do not you, on your part, fail to insert the advertisement."

"I shall take care not to forget."

CHAPTER XV.

THE LADY DETECTIVE.

MISS CHARLOTTE GOLDSMITH was seated in her cosy little private sitting-room, perusing a

novel by her favorite author, when a servant entered with a card.

"A caller?" the young lady remarked; "I did not hear the bell."

"Yes, miss," the servant responded; "a lady."

Charlotte took the card and glanced at it. On it was the name—"Mrs. Clementine."

"Show the lady up here," Charlotte directed, and the servant turned away at once to obey.

In a few moments Mrs. Clementine was shown into the room, and the servant withdrew immediately.

"You are Miss Goldsmith, I presume," the expected visitor observed, as she advanced into the room.

"I am," was the reply; "and you are from the office of Mr. Gilbert, of course. He told me a 'Mrs. Clementine' would call on me this afternoon."

"I am that person."

"Well, please to sit down, Mrs. Clementine, and let us get acquainted," the young lady invited.

Mrs. Clementine was a tall, dark woman, rather good-looking than otherwise, and was quite evidently a person of education and social refinement.

She sat down, and at the further invitation of Charlotte, removed her hat and light wrap.

"Mr. Gilbert has informed you, I suppose, about my loss, has he not?" Charlotte interrogated, then.

"Yes, he gave me the particulars of the case, so far as he knew them," the lady-detective answered, "and instructed me to come here and do my best to get at the truth of the matter."

"Then there is little more for me to tell you concerning it," Charlotte declared. "Whatever questions you desire to ask, however, I shall be pleased to answer. I desire to aid you in every way I possibly can."

"Then I am sure we shall succeed in our undertaking," the detective assured, cheerfully. "I have known cases where the loser was more interested to hinder than to assist," she added.

As she spoke her keen eyes were fixed upon those of the younger woman.

Mrs. Clementine, as it may not be out of place to state, was about thirty years of age.

Charlotte looked at her in surprise.

"I do not understand how any one could have such an interest in a personal loss," she confessed.

Her manner was perfectly frank.

"I will tell you," the detective rejoined. "In one case I know of, the lady had pawned her jewels to pay off a secret debt, and told her husband they had been stolen. In another, a young girl had given her diamonds to an impecunious lover."

"Can it be possible?"

"It is not only possible, but true. In both cases, though, the detective brought out the secret."

"I am glad to hear it. Such duplicity, such downright dishonesty, deserved to be found out and punished. I hope you do not expect to find some secret of the kind in my case."

Mrs. Clementine had plunged right into deep water at once. If Miss Goldsmith was holding anything back, she wanted to know it.

But her little ruse availed nothing, unless to prove that the young lady's story was true. If it were false, and she knew more about her stolen diamonds than she chose to tell, then she was a wonderful actress, for Mrs. Clementine's keen eyes could detect nothing of the dissembler in her face or manner.

"Oh, no!" she hastened to assure, "I expect nothing of the sort! Your open manner and ready expression of willingness to assist me, though, brought to mind those other cases in contrast, and I naturally mentioned them."

"I assure you, Mrs. Clementine, that the story I told to Mr. Gilbert is perfectly true."

"Do not imagine for a moment that I doubt it."

These remarks were exchanged in decidedly a low tone. Any one listening at a door would have been unable to catch a single word.

Mrs. Clementine having spoken first, on her entering, had set the tone, as it were, and Miss Goldsmith had naturally followed in nearly the same pitch.

Now Mrs. Clementine inquired:

"Are we entirely alone, Miss Goldsmith?"

"We are," Charlotte answered.

"No one in the house is likely to listen?"

"Oh, no! our servants would not be guilty of so mean a thing."

"I see you have full confidence in your servants."

"I have indeed!"

"Then it will be useless for me to suspect any of them. What I meant to say, though: we will conduct this conversation in guarded tones, in order that no one can become aware of my business here. Such knowledge would ruin my chances of success."

"It is a wise precaution."

"It is a sensible one, I think. Does your bedroom adjoin this room?"

"Yes."

"So I supposed. And does that open into the hall?"

"No; my maid's room adjoins it."

"And that one opens upon the hall?"

"No; into the bath-room. The bath-room can be entered from the hall."

"Yes, I see; and next to the bath-room on the other side—"

"Are my father's rooms, which are the same as these in plan."

"It is rather an oddly planned house, I should imagine."

"Yes, it is."

"It seems strange to have one's bedroom cut off from the hall."

"I suppose it must, if you have never seen houses built in this manner. I do not notice it. You see the staircase is right in the center, and occupies a large space."

"Yes, I noticed that. It runs from side to side in very short flights. Will you conduct me through your rooms and show me from where the diamonds were taken, so that I can fully understand the affair, and perhaps form an opinion in regard to it?"

"Certainly; please come with me."

Charlotte led the way through to the bath-room, where Mrs. Clementine looked around critically.

The door opening upon the hall was locked and bolted, and looked as though it was seldom used.

"This door is not much used, is it?" the detective questioned.

"No, it is not. Nor is the one leading to my father's rooms. In fact, I am the only one who uses this bath-room, unless I except my maid. Father has his bath in the room adjoining, which is like my maid's bath-room here; and the bath-room for our guests is on the next floor. You see I have a little castle all to myself," laughing.

"Yes; but it is not a very secure one, since your diamonds were so easily taken."

"So it seems."

Mrs. Clementine examined well the fastenings of the doors, and satisfied herself that neither the one leading into Mr. Goldsmith's rooms nor the one opening upon the hall had recently been opened.

"Can you tell me when this room was last painted?" she asked.

"The house was painted last summer, throughout," answered Charlotte.

"Is it possible that neither of these doors has been opened since then?"

"I do not think either of them has. But how can you tell?"

"There are no marks on the paint or the bolt."

"That is so."

"Then it is plain that the person who took your diamonds either entered from your sitting-room, or else by way of a window. Let me look at the window."

Charlotte conducted her from one window to another, until she had seen them all.

In the middle bedroom, air and light were admitted by a short, wide window near the ceiling, which, on the outside, was directly over the stairs.

The stairs, as mentioned, occupied a large space in the immediate center of the house, and consisted of short flights. Over that space was a large skylight, perhaps twenty feet square, of heavy glass. By this arrangement plenty of light was admitted to the interior of the house, in spite of the fact that it was sandwiched between larger houses on each side.

The window of the bedroom was of opaque glass, and could be used as a transom; but Mrs. Clementine soon saw that it would be impossible for any one to get into the bedroom in that way without the aid of a ladder of considerable size.

Nor did it seem possible for the thief to have entered by any other window.

"It seems pretty certain," the lady detective, decided, "that the person who took your necklace entered from the hall and passed through your sitting-room. It is clear that no forced entrance was made."

"I think you must be right."

"By the way, before we go any further, will you kindly turn the key in the hall door so that no one can enter unannounced?"

"Yes, if you desire it."

"If you please."

Charlotte obeyed the request, and then Mrs. Clementine said:

"Now for the bureau."

"It is here."

The young lady led the way back into the bedroom, and to the bureau from which her diamond necklace had so mysteriously disappeared.

"This is the bureau," she informed, "and this is the drawer. It is locked now the same as it was when the theft was committed."

"Please to show me the key."

Charlotte took the keys from her pocket, and selecting the right one, handed them to her.

Mrs. Clementine glanced at it and remarked: "A very ordinary key. An expert could pick such a lock with ease. May I open the drawer?"

"Certainly you may."

The lady detective did so.

The drawer contained such articles as gloves,

fans, jewelry, etc.," and in one end of it was the little casket from which the diamonds had been taken.

"Is this the box in which you kept your necklace?" the woman asked, as she laid her hand upon it.

"Yes, that is it."

"Is it locked?"

"No."

"Which is its key—this little one?"

"Yes, that one."

"It, too, is of common make."

"Then you think an expert burglar has picked the lock?"

"I do not know. It is possible that the drawer and box were opened in that way, or some one may have obtained possession of your keys and—"

"Oh, no, that is impossible."

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because the keys were not out of my possession between the time when I last locked the bureau and the time when I found out that I had been robbed."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Well, no; but I am pretty certain they were not."

"Nothing is certain in such a case. You had your keys in your pocket, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Then the one who entered your room may have done so while you were asleep, took the keys, secured the diamonds, and then replaced the keys where they were found."

"Goodness! do you think it was done while I was asleep?"

"I cannot tell, but it may have been. It was certainly done some time, and Mr. Gilbert said you told him it was between four o'clock in the afternoon and ten o'clock in the evening, or else between eight and nine next morning. You see you did not say anything about the remainder of the night."

"Because I did not think it possible that it could have been done while I was asleep. Besides, the door was locked as usual that morning, and as the key was in the lock on the inside, I do not see how it was possible."

"Everything is possible to the professional housebreaker. But let us—"

At that moment came a knock at the outer door.

CHAPTER XVI.

SOME LEADING QUESTIONS.

"Who is that?" Mrs. Clementine quickly asked.

"I think it must be my maid," Charlotte answered. "I will see."

Both passed out into the sitting-room, and then suddenly Mrs. Clementine caught Charlotte by the arm, as she was going to open the door, and drew her back and whispered:

"For fear it may not be she, Miss Goldsmith, I will remain in the bedroom. I do not want to be introduced to any one until I have made a suggestion to you. What is your maid's name?"

"Her name is Fanny Good."

"If it is she, then, mention her name on opening the door. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

The lady detective stepped back into the bedroom then, and Charlotte at once opened the door.

It was her maid, as she had guessed.

"Oh! it is you, Fanny," she exclaimed.

"Yes, Miss Goldsmith."

"Come in; I have a little errand for you."

"Yes, Miss Goldsmith," and the trim little waiting-maid entered.

"I want you to take a note to Miss Dillingsworth for me," the young lady continued. "I thought of going to see her this evening—at least I thought so yesterday, but now I have company and cannot go."

"Yes, 'm."

Charlotte sat down at a desk and wrote a brief note hastily, and giving it to the maid, directed her to go with it at once.

Fanny said "yes 'm" again, and was gone.

As soon as the door closed after her, Mrs. Clementine came out.

"That was cleverly done," she complimented, "but it was unnecessary to send the girl away."

"It was a real errand, however."

"I thought possibly you invented it to fit the occasion."

"No—or only partly so. I had told Effie—Miss Dillingsworth—that I would call, but that was because I met with my loss. You are my 'company.'"

"And you could not have pleased me better than by saying that," the lady detective declared.

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Let me sit down and I will explain."

They resumed their seats, and then the detective said:

"In your interview with Mr. Gilbert you informed him that you belong to a charitable society, the object of which is to assist poor but worthy women to find suitable employment;

and gave him this card for me to present when I came here."

"Yes," Charlotte assented, as she accepted the card; "in the event of my not being in when you came, or of my having company, you could have made it useful."

"No doubt; but as it turned out, I am glad I had no occasion to use it."

"Why so?"

"Because I did not quite approve of the plan you suggested to him."

"No?"

"No. I half-formed an opinion when Mr. Gilbert related the circumstances to me, and the part you planned, I think, would prove a hindrance to me. I am here on business, you see, and I must speak plainly."

"Certainly."

"Your plan was for me to come here as a woman in search of employment, asking the help of your excellent society, and while I waited for 'something to turn up'—as it were, you meant to give me some light work to do."

"Yes, such was my suggestion, Mrs. Clementine, but if such a position is not acceptable, if your pride—"

"My pride, nonsense! I ask to be put actually in the kitchen, in some cases I take hold of."

"Can it be possible?"

"It is. But in this case I would like to be a little higher honored. I would like to be regarded as a distant relative, or friend of the family."

"That cannot be. It would cause papa to demand to know what is going on."

"Can you not accept me, then, as an old school mate?"

"Yes, I suppose so; but what for?"

"For this reason: The idea I have in regard to the case can be best investigated if I am considered as a friend and guest, or something like it. Then, if necessary, I can have my maid join me. My maid, you know, would be an assistant."

"I see."

"And since you have expressed such entire willingness to aid me—"

"Say no more about it, please; I am willing to help you in any way in my power. You are Mrs. Clementine, a lady whom I knew when I attended school at B—."

"That will do nicely. Do not be afraid that I shall shame you in the presence of your friends, by any disregard of social forms and requirements."

"I have no such fears."

"Then that point is settled, and that is the suggestion I wanted to make. We can now return to the business we have in hand."

"I do not like to engage in any form of deception whatever," Charlotte reflected, "but in this case it is perfectly harmless, and I do not want papa to learn that my diamonds have been stolen if I can help it."

"So you told Mr. Gilbert, but really I cannot see why you should want to keep it a secret from him."

"Oh! you know he gave them to me, and I would not like to have to tell him I have lost them. After they are recovered, then I shall tell him all, of course; and it will be a great deal easier then. If you cannot recover them, then of course I shall have to tell him; but I want to make an effort to find them first."

"Yes, I see. By the way, are you acquainted with Alexis Knight?"

Charlotte looked at the lady detective in astonishment.

"Yes," she answered; "are you?"

"No, but I have heard of him."

"I say I am acquainted with him," Charlotte supplemented, "but it is only in the way of having him introduced to me and meeting him a few times. But why do you ask?"

"I will tell you presently. Where did you first meet him?"

"At the home of my friend, Miss Dillingsworth."

"He is quite a frequent caller there, is he not?"

"I believe he is."

"Seeking Miss D.'s hand, perhaps?"

"I believe her uncle wants her to accept his attentions."

"Her uncle?"

"Yes; her father and mother are dead, and her uncle is her guardian—or rather he was until she became of age."

"Then it is he, the ex-guardian, who wants her to marry him?"

"Oh, no! it is another uncle, her uncle Boniface."

It will be seen that Mrs. Clementine was interested in more cases than one.

She, too, was asking questions about the Dillingsworth family.

And so it was. She had received full instructions from Gilbert of Gotham, and was playing accordingly.

"I believe Mr. Gilbert said something about the Dillingsworths—that one of them is becoming insane."

"Yes, that is the ex-guardian, as you call him. His name is Edmund."

"Oh, yes! it was he who called here this

morning. Mr. Gilbert said he asked you who had called, and you told him Mr. Dillingsworth, and—and—"

"And Mr. Oldwood."

"Yes, that was the name, Mr. Thorne Oldwood."

"Yes."

"Are he and Mr. Knight acquainted with each other?"

"Yes, they are quite good friends, I believe. But why are you interested in Mr. Knight, since you have never met him?"

"I promised to tell you, and may as well tell you now, why it is. I desire to make the acquaintance of Mr. Knight, and if opportunity offers, I should like you to introduce him to me."

Miss Goldsmith was more surprised than ever.

"Do not be surprised," the lady detective added, "for we sometimes resort to peculiar and roundabout ways to gain an object in view."

"I do not doubt that, but how can Mr. Knight have anything to do with the loss of my diamonds?"

"It is not to be supposed that he can," the detective answered, "but at the same time I want to make his acquaintance with an object in view."

"Very well, I will introduce you the first chance that offers. Upon the recommendation of Mr. Gilbert, of whom my father speaks very highly, I have no hesitation in doing so."

"Thank you. Be assured that I shall not abuse your confidence. I would like, too, to meet Mr. Oldwood, but that is of no moment."

It was of more moment than she wanted Miss Goldsmith to suspect.

She had been asking some leading questions under the guise of very unimportant conversation.

She had been given careful orders by her employer, who, as the reader has seen, intended her to work upon both cases as far as possible. She had now learned that Alexis Knight and Thorne Oldwood were, as Miss Goldsmith expressed it, quite good friends, and an introduction to one or both of those gentlemen might bring something to light concerning one case or the other, and perhaps both.

Where she had any suspicion, there the lady detective touched lightly; but where there was nothing, as she believed, there she endeavored to lead Charlotte's attention.

"You shall meet him," Charlotte promised.

Mrs. Clementine then questioned the young lady in much the same manner as Mr. Gilbert had done, only more closely, but no additional light was thrown upon the matter.

She cautioned her, too, as he had done, to say nothing about her loss to any one, and thus the subject was dropped.

When Charlotte's maid returned, Charlotte presented her to her friend, and instructed her to make herself as useful to her as she could.

The maid brought a note in reply to the one sent, in which Miss Dillingsworth informed her friend of the accident to her Uncle Boniface, and also of her Uncle Edmund's bad turn in the forenoon and his wonderful improvement since.

These two items of news Miss Goldsmith mentioned to Mrs. Clementine, casually, and they seemed to interest that lady not a little.

"I would like to see that crazy uncle," she remarked, "if it were possible. I am always interested in such cases."

"Would you, really?" queried Charlotte.

"Yes," the lady detective assured; "and it would be a real pleasure."

"Effie adds to her note—'Can't you come anyhow, and bring your "company" with you? Would you like to go?'"

"I hope you will not think I was trying to force an invitation, but it might prove a good chance for me to meet Mr. Knight."

"That is quite true, and we will go."

Mrs. Clementine won Charlotte's good will almost at once. She was a charming talker, possessed a power to win regard, and was evidently what she seemed—a lady.

Charlotte introduced her housekeeper to her, and instructed that good woman and all the other servants, to regard her as a guest to be especially honored.

Later came the introducing of the lady to Mr. Goldsmith, when Charlotte escaped with the simple statement—"an esteemed friend."

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. JONATHAN JAYBIRD.

WHEN E. Claude Montpensier left the office of Detective Gilbert, he was "weal angwy."

In coming to the detective to engage him to recover the lost dog, the dude was thoroughly in earnest.

What was a detective for, anyhow? A lost dog was lost property, and why should a detective refuse to engage to find it?

What need it matter to the detective what he was looking for, whether a stolen dog or a stolen watch, so long as he was paid for his work?

E. Claude decided that it "wath one of thoth' thingth which no fellah can find out."

And he went away in high dudgeon.

One thing he could not understand was, why

the detective had not said at once that he could not take the case, instead of keeping him there the better part of half an hour.

It was because he was a "cad," a "deuthed cad."

The dude's case was simply this:

On the previous day he was out for a walk with Miss De Smythe, he leading her dog, when suddenly a big dog pounced upon the little one and made off with it.

He wanted to engage an able detective to recover the lady's pet.

And he had more than a passing interest in the matter, too.

Miss Antoinette De Smythe was the only daughter of a millionaire pork packer, and E. Claude wanted to win her hand in marriage.

He, the dude, had only a small fortune, and was fast living it up, and his only hope in life was to win the millionaire's daughter.

Everything had been going on nicely, and E. Claude was beginning to feel sure of his ground, when—*presto!* he allowed a big dog to carry off the lady's pet—the pride of her heart, and she was inconsolable.

Like somebody or other of old—she wept, and would not be comforted; and the heart of the dude was troubled sore.

What was he to do?

He had never yet ventured to tell of his love to the object of his devotion, thrown himself upon his knees before her and asked for (access to her daddy's pocketbook) her hand; and now he felt that it would be worse than folly for him to do so.

No; the case seemed plain: he must recover that dog or his cause was lost.

He had puzzled his brain considerably over the matter, until at last he happened to think that perhaps a detective could help him out, and then he became hopeful at once.

Now, however, he had consulted one of the best detectives in the city, as Gilbert had been described to him, and his heart was heavy.

But he did not mean to give up.

After a time he learned the address of another detective, and made another effort in that direction.

But this time he failed even worse than before.

He was actually laughed at.

He did, however, learn the address of another gentleman, who, he was informed, might be induced to undertake such a task, provided there was money in it.

"Money ith no object," declared the dude; "I want that dawg wecovered, and I am willing to pay for it. No, bah Jove! money ith no object in a cath'-like thith!"

The name of the gentleman he was referred to was "Mr. Jonathan Jaybird."

E. Claude made a note of the address, and set out immediately to find Mr. Jaybird.

When he reached the building where that gentleman's office was said to be, he could not help noting the vast difference between it and the one occupied by Gilbert of Gotham.

It was a very old building in a narrow, out-of-the-way street, and its front entrance was anything but inviting.

But E. Claude cared nothing for that. He was determined to have that dog if he had to move heaven and earth. It was his only thought.

Entering boldly, he climbed the dingy stairs, and found himself in a long, dimly-lighted hall.

Here he paused to look around.

Near by was a door, the upper part of which was of glass, on which he could read the number of that room and the name and calling of its occupant.

Taking this as a starting-point, the dude started down the hall, glancing at the other doors as he passed them.

Presently, on the very last door of all, at the end of the hall, he found the sign:

"JONATHAN JAYBIRD,

Attorney-at-Law."

Below that, in smaller letters, were the words:

"Detective Work a Specialty."

E. Claude read these legends with a good deal of satisfaction.

Any person who boldly advertised detective work as a specialty, he reasoned, must know his business well.

He knocked timidly at the door.

"Come in," a high-pitched voice called out, "come in!"

The dude entered.

He found himself in about the most miserable den that was ever called an office.

It was a very narrow room, with one window. Near the window was a weary-looking desk, with some old and badly-worn volumes stacked up against the wall and some lying on the floor. There were two or three chairs, and a very worn carpet. Also a very small stove, which looked as though it was doing duty as a spittoon.

Seated at the desk was Mr. Jaybird.

He was a lean, wrinkled and dried-up little man of fifty, with skin as yellow as old parchment. He wore no beard, had a hook-nose, and

was bald. He was not beautiful to look upon, and he had a pair of very small, bright, bead-like eyes that reminded one of a snake. He wore a very shiny suit of black, and the aromatic odor of bad whisky pervaded the den.

He had been leaning back with his feet upon the desk, evidently taking a nap, and only looked up half-awake when the door opened.

The moment he caught sight of the exquisitely-dressed dude, though, he straightened up instantly.

"Aw—aw—are you Mithter Jaybird?" E. Claude asked.

"That's me, sir, that's me," Mr. Jaybird responded, cheerfully; "take a chair."

The dude sat down.

"You thee, thir," he said, "I want to engage a reliable man to do a little detective work, and I wath diwected to you."

Mr. Jaybird was now all attention.

"Ah! yes, I see, I see!" he exclaimed, with a meaning wink and a crafty smile. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, thir, you thee I have loht a dawg; beautiful dawg—perfectly too chawming for anything; and I want to engage you to wecover it for me."

Mr. Jaybird's face was a study. It took on an expression of mingled anger and disgust. He did not know whether the dude was in earnest, or whether he was making fun of him.

"It ith weally tho, thir, I ath'ure you," the dude added; "and I expect to pay you, thir."

"Say," the lawyer-detective demanded, "who sent you here, anyhow?"

The dude told him.

His face lightened at once.

"Yes, yes; I see, I see!" he exclaimed. "Let me have the particulars of the case, now, and I will see what can be done."

"You think you can help me?"

"Yes, yes, I think I can, to be sure."

"Aw—don't be a cad, I pway; don't have me tell you all about it, and then wefuth' me. If you do, bah Jove, I'll—I'll—leave your offtith in dithgutht!"

"No, no. I think that will be unnecessary; I think I can safely say I'll help you."

E. Claude went ahead then, and told his story in about the same words in which he had told it to Nathan Gilbert.

Mr. Jaybird listened attentively, though he could not help smiling now and then, and when the dude concluded, said:

"But, my dear Mr. Montpensier, have you not reflected that the chances is about ten to one against us?"

Mr. J.'s grammar was slightly out of joint, but his meaning was plain.

"I thuppoth it will be a difficult tathk, no doubt," E. Claude assented.

"And have you not reflected that the chances is about twenty to one against our finding the dog alive?"

"Good heaventh!" the dude gasped, "I had not thought of that! Pwehaph that howwid big dawg hath made a meal off poor little Claude."

"Just as like as not, Mr. Montpensier; but if not, I promise you that I will put forth every possible human effort to recover the pet."

"Aw—thankth, awfully! Will you weally twy to find it?"

"I will, I assure you. Of course there will be more or less expense incurred in making a thorough search, for I assure you I shall put none but expert detectives on the case; and a small retaining fee—"

"Aw—yeth, to be thure: about how much, Mithter Jaybird?"

"Well—er—let me say fifty dollars. I—"

"Fifty dollahs!" E. Claude exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes," with the blandest of smiles. "You see my usual charge is one hundred, even money, where I do not know the party; but in your case I'll call it fifty."

"But—aw—ithn't that wather high?" the dude complained.

"Oh! well," and Mr. Jaybird threw himself carelessly back, "I don't believe I care to take such a case anyhow."

"Oh! but you mutht, Jaybird, you mutht, weally!" E. Claude cried out, quickly. "I will pay it, you know; bah Jove! Here, take the money. I mutht have that dawg at any coht, you know."

Mr. Jaybird did not hesitate about accepting the money. In truth he pounced upon it with the avidity of a hawk upon a chicken, though he tried not to show his eagerness.

"Very well," he said, "since you insist upon engaging my services, I will do the best I can. This trifle is merely a retaining fee, you understand."

"Aw—yeth, to be thure. And now, when am I to call again?"

"Well, say to-morrow."

"All wight, I will be here, and I do hope you will have the dawg."

"I hope so, sir; but it is very uncertain. If the dog is alive, though, I think it can be found within a few days at most."

The pettifogger then made some inquiries concerning the exact place where the big dog had made the attack, in which direction the

little dog was carried off, a description of the marauder, etc., and then the dude went away.

He went at once to the De Smythe mansion on Murray Hill.

Miss De Smythe was "at home," and he was ushered into her presence.

Miss Antoinette De Smythe was a young lady of twenty-eight, and a perfect specimen of the feminine gender of that peculiar genus of which E. Claude Montpensier represented the masculine. She was called a "dudine."

She was tall and slender, and not particularly beautiful; nor was her beauty any enhanced by a pair of large blue spectacles.

"Aw—my deah Mith De Thmythe," the dude exclaimed on entering, "how do I find you? Have you wecovered from the tewwible fwight of yethterday?"

"No, aw—I have not quite recovered, Mr. Montpensier. It was indeed terrible."

"It wath, awfully."

"And you see I have put on half-mourning for poor little Claude," the lady added.

"Yeth, I thee, and it weally unnerv'th me. But, I weally hope the deah cweature ith not dead, and that I may be able to weturn him to you."

"Oh! do you think there is any hope?"

"Yeth, I think there ith. I have employed one of the vewwy betht detectiv'th in the thity, and he thayth he thinkth there ith hope."

"Oh! I am so glad! Only return poor little Claude to me, and I—I will consider you the very best friend I have."

"I only hope I can do it, Mith' De Thmythe," E. Claude cried. "I would be the happietht man in the whole world. Oh! if I could only tell you how mitherable I have been ever thinth the thad event, I am thure you would pity me. Your forgiv'neth I dare not athk."

"I forgive you, freely. It was no niore your fault than mine. It—"

"Oh! yeth it wath; it wath all my fault! I ought to have cawwied the deah little fellah in my armth."

"But I forgive you, freely. I shall never forget how bravely you shook your cane at the horrid brute, and shouted 'Booh!' to scare him away; nor how scornfully you looked at the idle crowd—what a superior air was yours!"

"Weally, you do me pwoud, Mith' De Thmythe," E. Claude ejaculated, with a blush of pride; "but I thall never be happy until I have made every effort to wethtore your pet to your armth. No. never; bah Jove, no!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE "RETREAT."

WHEN Boniface Dillingsworth was knocked down by the team of runaway horses, he was quite seriously hurt.

He was rendered insensible at once.

Alexis Knight had a narrow escape from the same fate, or a worse.

The moment the team had passed, and he found that he was safe, Knight sprang to the elder man's assistance.

A crowd quickly formed, as is always the case, and among the persons collected was a doctor.

He stepped forward immediately, mentioned to Knight who he was, and, assisted by a policeman, they carried the injured man into a near-by drug-store.

There the doctor examined the hurt.

Either a hoof, or a wheel of the wagon, had struck Boniface on the head, making quite a severe contusion, but the doctor decided that no harm had been done to the skull, and predicted that the man would be all right next day.

Knight sent a messenger forthwith to the "Home," as the headquarters of the New Order of the Occident was called, and in a short time two of the men of that institution appeared with a light but strong stretcher.

On this Father Boniface was placed, and then was carried home.

The stretcher had a covering, so that it was impossible for persons on the street to see what it contained, and Knight walked beside it to keep the covering in place.

When they came to the wall which inclosed the "Home," and paused at the gate, the guardsman opened it without delay.

Knowing that a stretcher had been taken out, he was on hand to open the gate promptly when the men returned with it.

Ascending the two or three steps, the men carried the stretcher in, followed by Knight.

As they entered, a very diminutive dog sprang from behind some bushes and began to bark at them furiously. It was, in appearance, a "cur of low degree," but it was dyed a very fashionable color, and around its neck was a gold-mounted collar, to which was attached a piece of soiled ribbon. On the collar was engraved the name, "Claude."

"Get out, you cur!" the man ahead cried, and, giving the dog a kick, he sent it flying across the walk and into the bushes like a football.

"Where did that cur come from?" the other carrier demanded.

"That dog is mine," the gateman answered, sharply, "and I don't want him kicked."

"Then keep him out of the way," said the one who had kicked it.

"That dog can't hurt any one; he's too little," the gateman returned, "and I won't have it kicked."

"But where did you get it?" the questioner repeated.

"Why, a big dog was dragging it down the street here by its ribbon, yesterday, when the ribbon broke and the little thing dodged under the gate and I caught it."

It took but a moment for these words to be exchanged, and the men bearing the stretcher had barely paused.

"Don't stop to talk about dogs now," cried Knight, "but hurry on."

On they went, and the guardsman closed and locked the gate, and then extricated the dog from the bushes, where, held fast by its remnant of ribbon, which had caught on a sharp twig, it was barking—or rather yelping—its loudest.

As the reader has undoubtedly guessed, this was the "dawg" for which E. Claude Montpensier was so anxiously searching. And, it may be as well to add here, that little dog had its humble part to play in the events of which this romance is the history.

Father Boniface was carried on and into the house, where he was taken directly to his private room and put into bed.

There was a doctor connected with the institution, and he was called without delay.

He came immediately and made an examination of the wound, but the flesh had by this time swollen so that he could not decide whether the skull was fractured or not.

He set to work speedily to apply restoratives to bring the victim to consciousness, and also to reduce the swelling and drive out inflammation.

Until this was done, he would not venture an opinion.

Alexis Knight, however, reported what the doctor at the drug store had said, so there was lively hope that the injury would not prove dangerous—or at least not fatal.

"What about sending word to his brother?" suggested Knight, later in the day, in a questioning tone, addressing the man next in authority after Father Boniface.

"It will be well to do so," was the reply. "I will attend to it."

Accordingly, about the middle of the afternoon, a messenger was sent, and the report was received at the Dillingsworth mansion in the manner shown.

Some time later, while the doctor was again busy dressing the hurt, another young man, a little younger than Knight, perhaps, entered the room.

This was Thorne Oldwood, who, like Knight, was a younger member of the Order, and had not risen to the dignity of a cowl and gown.

He greeted Knight, and after a time the pair repaired to Father Boniface's room on the floor below.

"What are you doing here?" Knight then asked.

"Why," returned Oldwood, "the old man sent for me."

"Sent for you?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I don't know. He sent word for me to come and see him this afternoon, and here I am."

"Have you inquired of the other authorities of the Order?"

"I asked Crabber, but he knows nothing about it."

Crabber was he mentioned as being next in authority after Boniface.

"Then I guess you will have to wait until the old man comes to, to learn."

"It looks that way, certainly."

"Where are you going to-night?"

"I do not know. I suppose I must remain here until I learn what is wanted of me. Why do you ask?"

"I thought perhaps you would like to make an evening call at the Dillingsworth residence with me. I understand Miss Goldsmith is expected."

"I should be delighted, but you see how I am situated. We are required to be attentive to orders here, above everything else, you know."

"Yes, too much so, it seems to me. But we cannot help that."

"By the way, how are your affairs progressing?"

"Hang me if I know. It strikes me that Effie's preference is for Julian Gladstone, and that my chances are slim; but Boniface has great influence over her, and he assures me that I am to look upon her as mine. I don't know how it will come out. How does your case stand?"

"It is just about the same as yours. I know that Charlotte loves Clarence Dillingsworth, but Father Boniface tells me he is using his influence with the old man Goldsmith, and he may be able to make it all right for me. I hope so, anyhow. There is plenty of money in it."

"Yes, if we could have it all to ourselves,

there is, but as soon as we come into possession we are bound to turn the lion's share of it over to this Order."

"Yes, curse it. I wish we could beat them, but we can't. Father Boniface overreached us long ago. We are in his power, and must do his bidding. He can make us or break us, as it may please him. We are helpless. We must accept his terms, or get nothing."

"But, after all, it is not so bad. I tell you the girls are angels in disguise," declared Knight.

"Oh! I am not kicking very hard, my dear fellow. My only fear is that the fish will get off the hook before I can land it. Let me tell you that Clarence Dillingsworth is a rival to fear. The chances are ten to one in his favor."

"So it is with me," cried Knight, "but I mean to go in to win. If Julian Gladstone gets the prize out of my hands, he has got to fight for it. I am determined."

"Well," said Thorne, "I shall do all I can, and I can do no more."

"By the way," inquired Knight, "how are you fixed for money?"

"I have got loads of it," declared Thorne, exultantly, and as he spoke he drew a large roll of bills from his pocket.

"Whew!" whistled Knight, "I should say you have! I guess you trimmed the tiger's claws last night, by the looks of that roll."

Thorne Oldwood laughed.

"There are more ways than one of getting money in mighty Gotham," he returned. "How much can I favor you with?"

"Can you spare a hundred?"

"Heavens! how modest you are! I can spare five hundred or a thousand just as well."

"Do you mean it?"

"Of course I do. Name the sum, old fellow; I'm your banker."

"Well, call it two-fifty, then?"

"Can't do it. Haven't a fifty in the pile. Here," drawing out five bills of one hundred dollars each, "take these, and if you want more while my purse is full, don't hesitate to ask."

Knight took the bills, saying:

"Hang me if you don't seem to have struck it rich. You don't mean to tell me that every bill in that roll is a 'C,' do you?"

"Just what they are, my son, and no mistake."

With a laugh, Oldwood put his money away, and Knight pocketed his loan.

Just then came a rap at the door.

Knight bade the knocker enter, and the guardsman of the hall opened the door and asked:

"Is Father Crabber here?"

"No," responded Knight, "he is up with the doctor attending to Father Boniface. What is wanted?"

"Two young men are at the gate asking admittance."

The telephone had been ringing, but neither Knight nor Oldwood had thought to answer it, so the guardsman at the gate had had to run up to the house in person and announce the callers to the sentinel there.

"Who are they?" Knight asked.

"Mr. Clarence Dillingsworth and Mr. Julian Gladstone."

"Go up and report them to Father Crabber. I have no right to order them admitted."

"Our rivals, eh?" remarked Oldwood, when the man had closed the door and started off.

"Yes, so it seems. They have come to see Boniface, no doubt."

When the sentinel found Crabber, he was ordered to admit the two young men without delay and conduct them to the room where the injured man was.

In a few minutes they were there.

Clarence had met Julian Gladstone on the way, and when he told him about the accident, Julian turned and accompanied him to the "Home."

They found the injured man still unconscious, and the doctor still reluctant to express any decided opinion.

As they could do nothing, they descended to the room below.

There they met Alexis Knight and Thorne Oldwood, who at once assumed all the seriousness and dignity that their position in such a society demanded.

The four young men were on quite friendly terms, and an hour in social conversation was soon passed.

At the end of that time the victim of the accident was in about the same condition, and Julian having some business to attend to, departed.

A short time later and Knight, too, went away.

An hour later still, and Clarence went home, but soon returned again and remained till evening.

By that time there was a change for the better. Boniface had shown some signs of returning consciousness, and had fallen into a healthy sleep.

With this cheering report, Clarence took his final leave for the night, and went home; but Edmund, when he heard it, could not repress the unspoken thought, "Better for us all that he had died."

CHAPTER XIX.

EDMUND GIVES WARNING.

A LITTLE time after Clarence Dillingsworth's return Edmund sent a request to Effie to come to his private sitting-room.

The young lady hastened to obey, wondering what her uncle wanted.

She knocked at his door, and being told to enter, went in.

Edmund was seated in his easy-chair, and greeted her with his usual smile of welcome.

He was indeed himself once more, and Effie was glad to see him looking so bright and cheerful.

"Here I am, Uncle Edmund," she exclaimed, and crossing the room with playful skips, she sat down on a low stool at his feet.

"And no doubt you wonder why I have requested you to come up here in my bachelor's hall."

"And of course you will tell me."

"To be sure. In the first place, however, I want to explain that I have called you up here in order to speak to you privately."

"Yes, uncle."

"And, secondly, let me say—do not be alarmed, though—that what I have to say to you is upon a matter of the greatest possible moment to you."

"Indeed."

"It certainly is, although it is quite possible that you will not agree with me."

"We shall see."

Effie's face was now quite grave, and both were speaking seriously.

"Yes, we shall see," Edmund repeated.

"And now, Effie," he added, "do you think I am in my right mind at this moment?"

"You certainly are, uncle."

"Then you are prepared to pay heed to what I have to say."

"Yes, sir."

"You have now reached woman's estate, Effie, and it is naturally to be expected that you will marry."

"What nonsense!" the young woman exclaimed, her face growing a shade more rosy than its natural color.

"It may be nonsense," the old gentleman agreed, "but it is the chief aim of woman's life, and it is according to nature. And it is about marriage that I want to speak."

"Very well, uncle, I will listen to all you have to say."

"And I hope that you will heed me, too."

"As undoubtedly I shall."

"I hope so. I have watched you day by day, all the way from babyhood to maidenhood, and on to womanhood, and I love you as dearly as though you were my own child."

"I can well believe you do, Uncle Edmund, for certainly I have always loved you. I love Uncle Boniface, too, but I look upon you as more like a father to me."

"And loving you so, it is but natural that I should be anxious for your welfare and happiness. Now will you allow me to ask a delicate question?"

"It is your privilege to ask what you will."

"No, it is not; but allow me to ask this—has Alexis Knight asked you to marry him?"

Effie could not repress a start of surprise, but she promptly answered:

"No, sir."

"One question more—do you love him? Remember, I ask these questions for your own good."

"No, uncle, I do not."

"I am glad to hear you say it, for even if you did love him, and even had he asked you to marry him and had won your promise, I would say to you—As you value your happiness, do not marry Alexis Knight."

Effie turned instantly pale, and trembled in every limb.

"Why," she exclaimed, "Uncle Boniface has several times mentioned Mr. Knight to me, and I am sure he would be pleased to have me marry him. In truth, he evidently desires me to do so."

"What!" in well-feigned surprise, "is it possible?"

"It is not only possible, but true; and now you advise me not to marry him. It is very strange. Why do you advise against it, uncle? I am sure Mr. Knight must be an honorable man, to retain Uncle Boniface's regard as he does."

"Ah! you defend him, I see."

"Do not misunderstand me, Uncle Edmund. I do not care for him in the least. I am sure, though, that he must be worthy of me, or Uncle Boniface would never want me to marry him."

"It seems clear," said Edmund, holding back, with an effort, his indignation and his desire to tell the whole story, "that Boniface does not know what I do. I say it seems so. And I cannot tell him."

"What do you know, uncle?"

"I cannot tell any one. But, my child, take my warning, and do not marry Alexis Knight."

"But suppose Uncle Boniface should insist upon it?"

"Heed my warning, and do not marry him."

"But what reason am I to give if he demand a reason?"

"Any reason you like, but do not marry him."

"Then you know something about Mr. Knight which makes him unworthy of the confidence Uncle Boniface reposes in him?"

"Not so. Alexis Knight is wholly worthy of Boniface's friendship, but he is not worthy to marry you. My reasons I cannot give, but believe me—I speak only the truth. And I am in my right mind, too. I have not been so free, mentally, for weeks. Believe me, then, my child, and heed my warning."

"I will."

"Are you willing to promise?"

"I am. I believe you have some good reason for what you say, and I give you my word that I will never marry Alexis Knight."

"God bless you, Effie, you will never regret it. And now one word more: At this moment I am in my right mind, and am responsible for what I say. To-morrow I may not be, and may then advise what I now oppose. But, if such should be the case; if I join Boniface in urging you to wed Alexis Knight; do not heed me. Pay no attention to me, for I shall not be responsible for my words. Now, in my right mind, knowing perfectly well what I say and why I say it, I urge upon you this warning: Do not wed Alexis Knight."

Effie promised again that she would not. She saw that her uncle was thoroughly in earnest, and that he was in his right mind and responsible for his words.

"That is all I have to say," Edmund added, presently. "I have warned you, and I can do no more. No, I am not quite done. I have this to add: Do not tell Boniface or Clarence, or any one else, of the warning I have given you. Only keep it in mind, and remember your promise to me."

"I will obey you—"

"Obey" is not the word, since I have no authority to command. Only heed my warning and keep well my promise."

"I will."

"That is all."

"I must tell you, then, uncle, that I asked Clarence for his advice upon this very matter this morning, and I meant also to ask yours when opportunity offered."

"And what did Clarence advise?"

"Well, he could not give his advice unbiassedly, quite, but he told me to obey my own heart."

"Why was he unable to give his advice, unbiassedly?"

"Because he had already picked out a husband for me, it seems."

"Indeed? Whom does he desire you to marry?"

"Julian Gladstone."

As she spoke the name her color brightened.

"Do you love him?" her uncle asked.

"Uncle Edmund," she answered, taking his hand in hers and looking down at the floor as she spoke, "I do love Julian Gladstone. And now since you have given me fatherly warning in one direction, give me fatherly advice in another. If Julian ask me to marry him, what shall I say to him?"

"If you love him, as you say you do, answer him 'yes.' Julian Gladstone is entirely worthy of you, and you cannot make a better choice."

"Thanks, uncle, thanks. Rest assured that I shall not marry Mr. Knight. But what am I to do if Uncle Boniface opposes Julian—as he is sure to do? He is inclined to speak rather disparagingly of him, and has shown that he thinks Mr. Knight the better of the two."

"In that event, take the advice Clarence gave you and obey your own heart in the matter."

"Thanks again, Uncle Edmund. As I said to Clarence, I will tell Uncle Boniface that Mr. Knight need not hope to win me."

The old gentleman bent his head and kissed her pretty hair, saying:

"God bless you, my child, and may he keep you from harm."

Effie rose then, and after some further exchange of words kissed her uncle and left the room.

"Thank God she is warned," Edmund said fervently, "and warned in time. I am now in my right mind, and can prepare for the struggle. As soon as Boniface recovers, the old game will be begun again. Yes, better by far he had been killed; better for us all."

Later in the evening Charlotte Goldsmith and Mrs. Clementine called to see Effie; a little later came Alexis Knight; and after him came Mr. Goldsmith and Thorne Oldwood. The latter, finding that Father Boniface was not likely to be able to see him that night, had decided to accept Knight's invitation. Not being able to find Knight, he had gone to the Goldsmith residence. There he was too late to see Charlotte, but Mr. Goldsmith had just received a note from Edmund Dillingsworth, requesting him to call and see him, so Thorne was all right for some one to introduce him.

Soon after these arrived, Clarence came in in company with Julian Gladstone.

It was an important gathering.

Mr. Goldsmith was a great chess-player, as was Edmund Dillingsworth, and these two soon repaired to the latter's private sitting-room to

enjoy a quiet game, leaving the rest of the company in possession of the parlor.

Effie found herself called upon to entertain Julian Gladstone and Alexis Knight, which she did graciously enough, but her preference could not be hidden.

Clarence gave his attention chiefly to Charlotte and Mrs. Clementine, assisted by Mr. Oldwood in entertaining them; but as Mrs. Clementine engaged Thorne Oldwood most of the time, Clarence had Charlotte practically to himself.

A great part of the time, though, the conversation was general, so these divisions were not particularly noticeable.

The hour was quite late when the social party broke up and the guests departed, but late as it was, Edmund Dillingsworth requested another moment of private talk with Effie.

"You know what I said to you in regard to Alexis Knight," he said, "and I want you to give Charlotte Goldsmith the same warning against Thorne Oldwood. I warned Mr. Goldsmith, but he seems to be infatuated with the young man, or else has some deeper interest at stake, and I fear he will not heed me. It rests with you to save your friend. I give no reasons and you must enjoin upon her the necessity of secrecy; but, at any cost, do not allow her to wed Thorne Oldwood."

"I think there is little danger, uncle, for her preference is for Clarence, and I am sure that Clarence loves her."

"But still, if not warned she would obey her father, even though her heart rebelled. Warn her, and save her. It all rests with you."

CHAPTER XX.

A MIDNIGHT MARRIAGE.

A MONTH has passed.

Important events have happened—important to the characters of this romance, and the beginning of the end is at hand.

These events may be set forth in a summary manner.

On the day following the evening of which the last preceding chapter treats, Edmund Dillingsworth's advertisement appeared in one of the leading dailies.

Ten o'clock was the hour named for the applicants to call, and promptly at that hour ten or twelve men of various ages appeared.

They were shown into the small reception-room, or as it may more properly be called—the office or business-room, on the left of the hall, and requested to wait there.

At half-past the hour, when the applicants had ceased to arrive, Mr. Dillingsworth came down and entered the room where they were.

Seating himself at a desk, he bade the applicant nearest him to come forward.

Questions were asked and answers given, letters of reference were shown, and the applicant was returned to his seat and another was called.

Mr. Dillingsworth was in perfect good health and spirits, and conducted the examination in a thoroughly business-like and systematic manner.

One after another the applicants were called, the old gentleman taking the name of each and making notes as he questioned them, until he had treated all alike.

There were some who were undoubtedly well-qualified for such a position, who had excellent letters of recommendation; and, too, there were some who seemed to have no fitness at all.

When he had done, Mr. Dillingsworth examined his list very attentively for a few minutes, and then said:

"Mr. David James may come forward again."

One of the applicants obeyed.

He was a tall, well-formed man, perhaps forty years of age, and had the appearance of an Englishman. He wore no beard, but a pair of glasses half concealed his eyes.

This man was, as the reader well knows, Gilbert of Gotham.

Mr. Dillingsworth engaged him in conversation for some minutes, speaking in low tones, and then announced:

"My choice is made, and I have engaged this man to fill the place. My choice reflects no discredit upon the rest of you, for some of you are highly eligible for a place of the kind. I will bid you good-morning."

So the genuine applicants were dismissed, and "David James" entered upon his duties at once. He was very gentlemanly, made friends readily, and in a few days was quite at home.

Clarence and Effie agreed that their uncle had made an excellent choice.

Meanwhile, Boniface Dillingsworth, after lying in a state of stupor for two whole days, began to recover from the effects of the terrible blow he had received, and in a week he was up and nearly well.

Then again Edmund began to exhibit signs of weakened intellect, and his valet was required to be with him constantly.

Clarence and Effie had been very attentive to Boniface during his illness, and as soon as he was able he paid them a call.

He was pained to learn that Edmund had decided not to go to the "Home," and expressed a desire to see his valet.

Mr. James was called, and Boniface enjoined

him to give Edmund the very best care and attention, promising him that he should lose nothing by a faithful performance of his duty.

Effie had found opportunity to convey her Uncle Edmund's warning to Charlotte Goldsmith, and was pleased to learn that Charlotte had no thought or intention of marrying Mr. Oldwood, though her father was in favor of her receiving his attentions.

Mrs. Clementine was still at the Goldsmith residence as Charlotte's guest, but the loss of the diamond necklace was yet a mystery. She had grown quite friendly with Thorne Oldwood, and managed to make herself as agreeable to him as possible.

As the days went by, Edmund Dillingsworth grew worse and worse, until his valet could scarcely manage him.

On one or two occasions the valet got him under mesmeric control, or partly so, and so governed him, but not with the success of his first experiment.

One evening Edmund left the house in great haste, his valet following him, and neither returned.

Clarence and Effie were greatly worried, and Clarence hastened to inform Boniface at an early hour in the morning.

Boniface shared their anxiety, and search was begun at once. But no trace of the missing men could be found. The police were notified, and advertisements were issued, offering a large reward, but day after day passed by and no tidings were brought.

It was the mystery of the hour and the talk of the town.

And so passed the month away.

Late one evening Charlotte Goldsmith drew up to the door of the Dillingsworth residence, in her father's carriage, sprung out unaided, hastened up the steps, rung the bell sharply and inquired for Effie.

Effie was in the parlor with Julian Gladstone and her brother Clarence, the latter, however, having only just come in.

Effie excused herself and hastened to join Charlotte, who had gone up to her friend's private room.

"Oh! Effie, I am so miserable!" the unhappy girl exclaimed.

"What has happened?" Effie asked in alarm.

"Father says that I shall marry Thorne Oldwood to-morrow."

"He does?"

"Yes; and I have promised your brother Clarence that I will be his wife."

"And you have also promised me that you will never marry Thorne Oldwood."

"True, true; but father says I shall marry him, and that to-morrow. Oh! what am I to do?"

"And I say you shall not marry him to-morrow, or at any other time. You must not, shall not."

"But what am I to do? Father will force me to obey."

"He cannot do it."

"He can, and I fear he will, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless Clarence will marry me this very night and so save me. In no other way can I escape, for I have not the courage to defy my father unaided."

Effie grasped her friend by the hand and led her to a seat.

"Sit down," she commanded, "and let me talk with you."

Charlotte obeyed.

"How is it," Effie asked, "that your father has so suddenly decided that you must marry against your wish?"

"I do not know, but ever since Thorne Oldwood was introduced into our house, it has been his wish. It is only recently, however, that he has been severe with me. Poor father! always so gentle and kind to me; I cannot understand why he should suddenly become so severe and unjust."

"It is almost the same with my Uncle Boniface in regard to Alexis Knight," Effie declared.

"And your Uncle Edmund warned us against them both."

"Yes," tears springing to her eyes as she thought of her missing uncle; "and he meant it too. I never saw him more in earnest."

"And you intend to obey him?"

"Yes, decidedly."

"But your Uncle Boniface—"

"I have told him that I would not marry Mr. Knight."

"And he still insists?"

"Yes, almost to commanding me to do so. But it is useless. Even if I did not love another I would heed Uncle Edmund's warning and still refuse; but I love Julian, and he has this evening asked me to marry him."

"And your reply?" eagerly.

"It was 'yes,' of course."

"Oh! I am so glad! But, what of Clarence—is he at home?"

"Yes; he is down in the parlor."

"And will you tell him what I have said?"

"Yes."

"He has urged me to set the day, and I am ready now to become his wife this very hour."

"I will tell him. Wait here."

Effie hastened down, called Clarence aside and told him in a few words, and then she joined Julian in the parlor and Clarence went up to the room where she had left Charlotte.

A few minutes later Clarence came down with Charlotte leaning upon his arm.

"Friend Julian," Clarence said, "I have a favor to ask of you. I desire to make Miss Goldsmith my wife this very night, and I want you and Effie to go with us as witnesses. Will you go?"

"Willingly," Julian answered readily. "This is a genuine surprise, but I am equal to the emergency, I hope, as I suppose you are," turning to Effie.

"Quite so," Effie answered.

"Then," said Clarence, "let us go at once, for the hour is quite late."

In a moment they were ready, and hastened out and entered the carriage, Charlotte herself giving the driver his orders where to drive to.

When the carriage started, Julian inquired of Effie the cause of the sudden move on the part of Charlotte, and Effie told him all.

Speaking in low tones, their words could not be heard by the others.

"Effie," Julian said, "since you have promised to marry me, why not become mine to-night?"

"Oh! I could not think of it!" Effie exclaimed.

"Why not?"

"First of all, because of Uncle Edmund's uncertain fate."

"But I know he would approve of it, Effie," Julian urged, "for Clarence has told me as much. Besides, Clarence says your Uncle Boniface is urging you to marry Alexis Knight, so your position is not greatly unlike Miss Goldsmith's."

"Oh! yes it is," Effie exclaimed, "for Uncle Boniface has not the right to insist upon my marrying Mr. Knight."

At that moment Clarence came unexpectedly to Julian's aid.

"Julian," he said, "you called upon me a short while ago to congratulate you upon having won Effie's promise; why do you not urge her to join Charlotte and me, and let us have a double wedding?"

"That is what I am trying to do now," Julian replied.

"Then, Effie," Clarence exclaimed, "why do you not consent?"

"You forget Uncle Edmund," Effie reminded.

"No, I do not," Clarence returned. "I know he approves of Julian, and would be pleased to see you his wife."

It needed but Charlotte's voice in the matter to beat down Effie's objections and win her consent.

When the carriage stopped, it was before the door of a well-known minister's.

Clarence alighted and made known their errand, and being well acquainted with the minister, consent was readily granted.

The couples were ushered into the minister's study, where, in the presence of his wife and one old servant, and the midnight hour rolling on apace, they were joined in wedlock.

They drove back to the Dillingsworth mansion immediately, where Clarence, Julian and Effie got out, and then Charlotte returned home. Julian, too, bade his wife good night and departed, and Clarence and Effie entered the house.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DETECTIVE WORSTED.

ON the evening when Mr. Edmund Dillingsworth left the house in such haste, and failed to return, he was in a state of the wildest excitement.

The valet had been trying to keep him in and quiet him, but it was useless, and when at last the old gentleman sprung out of the room and hastened from the house, all the valet could do was to follow.

And that he did, promptly.

Mr. Dillingsworth hastened away toward the eastern part of the city at a lively walk, and the detective kept close behind him.

The latter knew that it would be folly for him to stop the old gentleman on the street and try to induce him to go back.

Such a course would only make a scene and draw a crowd, and that the detective did not want.

Nor would he attempt to take the old gentleman back by force.

Since he had failed to keep him in the house, he would follow and protect him until he returned of his own accord.

The old gentleman kept right on toward the East River.

He seemed to be rushing forward blindly toward some point to which he was irresistibly attracted.

He seemed to have no control of himself, except to obey the call and push forward.

Several times he ran into persons, and once, but for the steel arm of Gilbert of Gotham, he would have been run over and perhaps killed.

He was just about to cross a street, when a team of big bay horses, drawing a large open

carriage, dashed up the opposite side and around the corner.

One instant and Mr. Dillingsworth would have been thrown to the earth and perhaps killed; but the detective saw the danger, gave a mighty leap forward, grasped the near horse by the head and fairly threw it back upon its haunches.

The Steel Arm Detective was well named, for his strength was something quite remarkable.

Even as it was, the escape of the old gentleman was a narrow one, and those who saw it fairly turned pale and held their breath; but the old gentleman walked straight on, as though nothing had happened, looking neither to the right nor the left, but with his eyes fixed upon some object far ahead, as it seemed.

The detective brought the carriage to a full stop before he let go his hold of the horse, and then with a warning to the driver, allowed him to go on.

It all happened in a few brief seconds, and the valet-detective hastened on after his employer, soon coming up with him again.

Then he followed him as before, keeping about two yards or so behind him.

Mr. Dillingsworth kept straight on until he came to the river.

Then he stopped for a moment.

Glancing up and down the river-front street, as though uncertain which way to go, the old gentleman seemed unable to decide.

While they stood there a man came down the street, passed them, and continued on at a rapid gait.

The detective thought he recognized him, though he got but a glimpse at his face, as Alexis Knight.

Mr. Dillingsworth, who stood nearer to where he passed, evidently did recognize him, for no sooner had the man passed than he started after him.

And after them both went Gilbert.

The old gentleman tried hard to catch up with Knight, if he it was, without running, but could not do so, for the younger man was a fast walker.

After several futile attempts, the old gentleman finally did run, and came up with the other just as he came to the Greepoint Ferry Station.

Gilbert was then some little distance behind, but he saw that the man ahead of Mr. Dillingsworth slackened his pace a little as he neared the ferry, and that when the old gentleman came up with him he crossed the street and entered the ferry-house, the old gentleman following.

The detective ran quickly forward, then, and was just in time to see Knight—he now recognized him, though he was wearing an attempted disguise—paying two fares.

The detectives went right in, and a boat being in the slip, followed the other two on board immediately.

Knight walked right through to the forward end, where he leaned against the rail and lighted a cigar.

Mr. Dillingsworth advanced to the gates of the boat, rested his hands upon them and gazed fixedly at the lights on the opposite shore.

The detective remained further back, but secured a position where he could keep his employer in sight.

Presently the boat started, and crossed the river without any incident worthy of mention.

When it drew into the slip on the Brooklyn side, Gilbert advanced to Mr. Dillingsworth, laid his hand upon his shoulder, and said:

"Mr. Dillingsworth, shall we not remain on board and return home?"

The old gentleman looked around quickly, and Gilbert exerted himself to bring him under his mesmeric control.

But he failed to do so.

The light was not bright enough to enable him to hold the old gentleman's gaze, and besides the conditions were in no wise favorable.

"No," the old gentleman answered very shortly.

"May I inquire where you are going to?"

"I don't know."

"You do not know?"

"No."

"That is strange, certainly. Of course you want me to go with you, do you not?"

"Yes, come."

"A friend of yours?" Alexis Knight inquired, as he pressed forward with the other passengers.

"I am his servant, sir," the detective answered, briefly.

Mr. Dillingsworth glanced sharply at Knight, and was now evidently puzzled.

If he had recognized him at first sight, it must have been by his general appearance or gait.

Now he seemed uncertain.

The disguise Knight had adopted no doubt baffled him, though to the detective it seemed but a very bungling attempt at concealment of identity.

But Mr. Dillingsworth gave the matter but little thought, for suddenly his whole attention was drawn away, and his manner quickly

changed. He gazed straight ahead again, his face wearing an expression of strained anxiety, and his every nerve was seemingly drawn to its highest tension.

"Is the old man a little—" and Knight tapped his forehead as he left the sentence unfinished.

"Yes, sir, at times," the detective replied, and the boat being then secured, further conversation was cut off.

The moment the gates were opened Knight rushed off, and as he passed Mr. Dillingsworth, the detective noticed that he gave his sleeve a quick but vigorous jerk.

Instantly the old gentleman followed him as before.

Now Gilbert of Gotham regretted that he had allowed the old gentleman to cross the ferry.

He could have prevented him, but only by force.

Of course it would have made a scene of excitement, which would have required all the detective's coolness and determination to overcome, but he was equal to any emergency of the kind.

Now that the harm was done, however, he could only follow his employer and protect him.

He could have stopped him then and there, of course, but another moment's thought decided him to let him go on.

The pull given at Mr. Dillingsworth's sleeve by the younger man, made it plain to the detective that some plot of evil was at work. By allowing it to be carried on for a time, he might be able to pick up some valuable information.

Little did he imagine what the result of that decision would be to him.

Alexis Knight led the way straight up Greepoint avenue, Mr. Dillingsworth at his heels, and the detective and most of the other passengers from that boat stringing along behind them.

After going quite a distance, Knight turned suddenly into another street, the old gentleman followed, and Gilbert at once quickened his pace and pressed on after them.

He saw at a glance that this street was a dark and deserted one.

Here the game was against him, as he fully realized.

If he attempted to stop the old gentleman now, no matter what danger he was running into, Knight would have him "on the hip."

This was clearly evident.

If he accosted his employer there, Knight had but to call for police and declare that the old man was his father, uncle, friend or anything he chose, make a charge of assault against the detective, and the latter would be taken into custody (?), or at any rate detained.

"No, his time for that move was past. He should have made it on the boat, at the latest.

This he realized now when it was too late.

But do not let it be supposed that Gilbert of Gotham repented of his action.

He had full confidence in his prowess, and was fully determined to let the affair take its course.

He was armed, and at the proper moment would show his hand.

This was his determination.

And under ordinary circumstances, or even against odds in a fair fight, he would have been able to carry it out.

In this instance, though, the fates were destined to be against him.

His foes were ones whose strength he had not yet fully tested.

Of course no one knew, except Mr. Dillingsworth, that David James the valet was Nathan Gilbert the detective, but that made no difference to him in the present instance, or if it did it was in his favor. Had his true character been known, perhaps that night would have been his last on earth.

Almost as soon as Knight and Mr. Dillingsworth were around the corner, the detective caught up with them, and the three proceeded along the street almost abreast.

"You, too, live in this neighborhood?" Knight questioned, implying that he did.

"No, sir," answered the detective, "I am merely following my employer to protect him."

"You are armed, then?"

"Most assuredly."

Gilbert of Gotham had a wary eye upon Mr. Knight, and was keeping a sharp lookout for danger ahead.

But the danger was in the other direction.

Suddenly, and without the least sign of warning, two men in muffled shoes sprung up behind the detective, each dealt him a sharp blow with a "billy," and he sunk down to the ground without a groan.

The men never paused, then, but sprung upon Mr. Dillingsworth and pressed a chloroformed sponge to his nostrils.

It required but a moment for the soporific drug to do its work, and then the two men lifted the unconscious old gentleman up and bore him away, guided by Alexis Knight.

CHAPTER XXII.

BONIFACE SHOWS HIS HAND.

On the morning following the night of the midnight marriage, Father Boniface called at Dillingsworth mansion.

He called purposely to have an interview with Effie.

He found her and Clarence in the library, and noticed at once that their faces were unusually bright and cheerful, more so than they had been before since their uncle Edmund's sudden disappearance.

"What!" the hypocrite exclaimed, "do I find you so cheerful? Surely, then, you have good news of poor Edmund."

Their faces became serious in an instant.

"I wish we had," said Clarence, sorrowfully, "but we have not. If we seemed more cheerful than usual, Uncle Boniface, it was because we were, as I am ashamed to confess, thinking of other things at the moment."

"Do not blame yourselves, my children," Boniface remarked, "for the young cannot long remain sad. I can see by the sudden change my words have wrought that you are deeply grieved, as deeply as I am."

"We are indeed, uncle," Effie avowed.

"I can well believe it."

"And, by the way, Uncle Boniface," Clarence announced, "I have made a discovery."

"A discovery?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"I will explain. You know, or at least I suppose you do, that Uncle Edmund had a small safe in a closet in his room."

"Yes, yes," Boniface acknowledged, "I know it; but what of it?"

He seemed not a little interested.

"Yesterday, or last evening—to be more precise, I was in his room, looking around in the hopes of finding some clew to the mystery of his strange disappearance, when I happened to think of his safe."

"I found his keys, and in a few moments I had the safe open and was exploring its contents."

"Strange we did not think of it before," Boniface mused.

"So I thought," Clarence averred.

"Well, what did you find?" Boniface urged.

"Only one thing to which I can attach any importance."

"And that—?"

"The safe contained a great many private papers, some old letters, a little money and some bonds and so forth; but on top of everything else was this."

As he ended, Clarence drew a small slip of paper from his pocket and extended it toward his uncle.

"What is it?" Boniface inquired, his face now wearing a troubled expression.

"It is a receipt."

"A receipt?"

"Yes."

"A receipt for what, since you can attach importance to it?"

"Take it and read it, sir, and you will learn."

Boniface did as requested, and read as follows:

"Office of NATHAN GILBERT, Private Detective,
"No. — BROADWAY, NEW YORK CITY.
"\$300." "New York, Aug.—, 18—."

"Received from Edmund Dillingsworth, Three Hundred Dollars, in advance for one month's service from day of date. NATHAN GILBERT."

The reader will readily recall the circumstances under which this receipt was given, and will remember why it was put into the safe.

As Boniface read it his face grew pale and his hand trembled.

Clarence and Effie saw this, and Clarence asked:

"Why do you tremble and grow pale, uncle? Does it throw some light on the mystery which causes you to fear the worst?"

"My dear children," the rascal replied as he sunk down upon a chair, "I fear the worst. Little wonder that I tremble and turn pale. This receipt throws no light upon the subject, but the very fact of my dear brother's having engaged the services of a detective, shows that he must have had need for him; and if he needed a detective did he not have enemies?"

"You reason soundly," Clarence admitted, his own fears redoubled.

"And if he had enemies," Boniface went on, "perhaps they have removed him from their path. My God! this is terrible! and this clew must be given to the police at once."

"But where is that private detective, and why is he silent?" queried Effie.

"That is what I shall endeavor to learn as soon as possible," Clarence answered. "I intend to go to his office this morning."

The face of Father Boniface was a puzzle.

Could it be, he was asking himself, that the valet, David James, had been a detective in disguise?

If so, where was he now?

Boniface had no knowledge of the valet's whereabouts, nor had his rascally aide—Alexis Knight.

The detective had been left right where he fell when the attack was made upon him.

Had Boniface known before what he suspected now, the chances were that David James would have been even more severely dealt with than he was.

The uncertainty gave the good father not a little uneasiness.

He, too, decided to take action in the matter.

"Shall I keep this receipt, and give it to the police?" he suggested.

"No, I will retain it until I have visited the detective's office," Clarence answered.

Boniface handed it back to him.

"There is more of a mystery in all this than we can imagine," declared Effie.

"You are certainly right," Clarence agreed; "but whatever the secret is, I hope no harm has come to Uncle Edmund."

"Amen to that," Boniface said, solemnly and earnestly.

"Well, if you will excuse me," Clarence added, "I will set out at once. I am more than anxious to get at the bottom of this."

"Certainly; and good luck attend you," Boniface responded. "Leave nothing undone that can be done."

"Be assured that I shall not."

When Clarence was gone Boniface at once changed the subject.

"Effie," he said, "I suppose you have not forgotten the last conversation we had in this room."

"No," the girl answered, "I have not."

"The answer you gave me then was far from satisfactory."

"That answer was final, though, and I requested you not to mention the subject again."

"Your request I cannot obey. You must know that I have your best interests nearest my heart, my dear child, and nothing would please me so much as to see you become the wife of Alexis Knight."

"It can never be."

"But your reasons?"

"One is, as I have told you, because I do not love him."

"Then you have other reasons?"

"That one is all-sufficient."

"Perhaps some one has advised you against marrying him."

"Such advice would certainly be heeded, Uncle Boniface, but it would be unnecessary. I could not be induced to marry a man I did not love."

"But you would soon learn to love Alexis, for he is—"

"Pardon me for interrupting, but I tell you again it is impossible."

"Then you will not heed my advice, and grant me the pleasure I ask—the pleasure of seeing you happily wedded?"

"I am sorry, uncle, but I can never marry Alexis Knight. Now I hope you will accept that answer as final, and mention him to me no more."

Her manner more than her words expressed her firm determination, and the arch-villain saw that it was useless to press the subject further.

A cloud came over his face, and he could not quite conceal the evil of his nature.

Effie drew back from him in fear. For the first time she suspected—she knew not what. She saw that beneath the religious cloak and behind the smiling face was a man to be feared. And for the first time she feared him. Then her Uncle Edmund's warning impressed itself upon her mind with four-fold weight.

Boniface hastened to control himself and change his expression as quickly as possible, but the impression was made.

"Well, my dear child," he said, with all the earnestness and kindness he could force, "I can do no more. I have endeavored to guide you to a future of happiness, by bringing about a most suitable match. Were I your father, I would insist upon your obedience to my wishes. All I can say is this: I hope you may never regret your decision."

"I do not think I ever shall. I thank you, uncle, for your fatherly interest in me, but were you my father in fact I could not obey you in this."

"Very well, I have done my duty and can do no more."

Boniface took his leave, saying he had an engagement, and set out in the direction of the Goldsmith residence.

"Curse her!" he hissed, between his teeth as he walked along, "she shall obey my will! More than once I have experimented my mesmeric power upon her, and I know that I can control her. She shall marry Alexis Knight or she shall die. Curses upon both her and Clarence! They stand in my path! But for their youth I would kill them both, and then the fortune would come to me direct. But I would spare Effie, and for that reason I want to force her to marry Alexis Knight. Edmund and Clarence must die, but I will spare the latter for a time."

As he hissed these words half-aloud, his face was the face of a demon.

"And that girl of Goldsmith's," he added, "she, too, shall feel the weight of my hand if she refuses to marry Thorne Oldwood to-day. But she is hardly likely to refuse, I think. I have won old Goldsmith over so completely, by fair means and foul alike, that I feel sure of my ground there. The Goldsmith fortune, too, shall be mine, except the pittance I allow Oldwood to retain."

"Ha, ha, ha!" with a demon-like chuckle, "I

have been planning this game for some time, and it is now growing ripe. It will be a large plum for the Order, and to me will belong the honor of plucking it. And why should it not? Was it not I who planted the seed—so to put it? Have I not nurtured the growth of the tree? Ha, ha, ha!"

When he laughed it was with an inward chuckle, and his face assumed its worst expression.

If not unsound in mind, and he certainly was not, Boniface Dillingsworth was a demon in human form.

"All shall be mine—mine!" he grated. "Edmund will be found, when he is near his death, and will make his will in my favor and die. Effie shall marry the man of my choice, and the lion's share of her wealth will come to me. Clarence, too, shall die, but I will attend to him later on. Charlotte Goldsmith, too, is my prey. Oh! I am bound to win! and then for a life of high pleasures! But I must take care and play the game skillfully to the end. One false move may destroy it all, and—Fiends! what about that accursed detective? Can it be that he was Edmund's valet? If so, where is he? I must find out, and must be prepared to meet him if he appears upon the scene. It will be death for him, for I will stand at nothing!"

So the sleek old rascal mused as he walked, and in due time he arrived at Mr. Goldsmith's residence.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A NEAT SCHEME FOILED.

On that morning Charlotte Goldsmith arose with a new sense of security against the persecution of her father and Boniface Dillingsworth.

She was a wife—the wife of Clarence Dillingsworth.

Time after time she repeated her new name, partly because it pleased her ear and partly to become accustomed to it.

She fully expected to inform her father that morning, after that of course she would be called Mrs. Dillingsworth.

How strange it would sound! Surely she would never grow accustomed to it. Did it sound well with Charlotte?

These thoughts and a hundred others ran in her mind as she went about her rooms, singing.

Mrs. Clementine was still with her, but Charlotte had noticed of late that the lady detective was unusually sad and thoughtful.

Every morning her first question was concerning the missing Mr. Dillingsworth. Had anything been learned? And nearly every day she went out alone in the afternoon. She was growing pale and worn, and it was plain to be seen that she was worrying a great deal over something. But what could it be? What was Mr. Dillingsworth to her?

To any question put by Charlotte, she returned unsatisfactory answers, generally denying anything more than a passing interest in the case, and complaining of not feeling well to account for her pale and tired looks.

The mystery of the necklace was a mystery still, so far as Charlotte knew. If Mrs. Clementine had discovered anything she had not mentioned it.

"You were out late last night," the lady detective remarked, when she and Charlotte met for the first time that morning.

Charlotte blushed prettily.

"Yes," she acknowledged, "rather."

"Why do you blush about it? You look as pretty as a peach."

Charlotte's face grew crimson.

"Some little secret, I see," Mrs. Clementine exclaimed, laughing lightly.

"You are right," Charlotte owned, "and perhaps you will soon learn what it is."

She little suspected that the lady detective already knew it.

A poor specimen of detective she would have been, had she not watched the movements of the members of the household, and when Charlotte went out alone so late at night, her father not being at home, Mrs. Clementine went too.

In truth, she had actually witnessed the ceremony at the minister's house.

When Charlotte went out the lady detective followed. Charlotte had ordered the coachmen to have the carriage at the corner at a certain hour, and there she entered it. Mrs. Clementine, passing at the moment as a decrepit old woman, heard the direction Charlotte gave. As soon as the carriage was gone, she hastened to a near-by place of amusement, where she was sure to find a cab; engaged one; and was soon at the destination given. She was just in time to see the two couple entering the carriage, and gave directions to her driver to follow.

When the carriage stopped again the cab was not far behind it, and the latter passed right on and around the first corner. There it stopped, Mrs. Clementine sprung out, and telling the driver to wait, went immediately to the minister's house and knocked at the basement door. A colored woman, evidently the cook, answered; the detective told her she was the maid of one of the ladies who had just arrived; that her

mistress did not want the others to know she was there, etc., and a crisp bill into the servant's hand did all the rest.

This is explained at length to show the kind of material the lady detective was composed of.

She was resolved to learn the whole mystery of the missing diamonds, if possible, and to do that she must suspect everybody and learn all that went on.

Besides, she had now a deeper interest at stake than the diamonds; an interest which the reader has perhaps guessed.

But, more anon.

On this morning, as stated, Charlotte felt a new sense of security in her position.

She could defy her father, because, being already a wife, she could not be married a second time.

Her first intention was to go to her father at once and tell him all.

Further reflection decided her against that course.

She felt that she had been unjustly treated by her father, and her spirit of resentment prompted her to set his command at defiance without offering any further reason than her simple refusal.

She would show him that she had some of his own firmness in her.

Being secure in her position, she felt new strength, and resolved to act her role alone unless forced to declare her true position.

Her father, having been away all night, returned about ten o'clock in the forenoon.

He sent for her at once.

She went to him in the library, and after greeting her kindly, he said:

"You will prepare yourself to marry Thorne Oldwood this morning. He will soon be here, and when I send for you I want you to come down. See that you obey. I have ever been overkind to you, and have allowed you to have your own way in all things, but now the time has come for you to obey me in one thing."

"Father," Charlotte answered, "I am willing to obey you in all things but that one. I cannot marry the man you have chosen."

"You can and you shall!" the old gentleman thundered.

"I cannot, father, and I will not."

This was said calmly, and the girl's show of spirit surprised her father beyond measure.

For a moment he was silent, and then he cried:

"Go! go to your room! And see that you come down promptly when I call."

Charlotte bowed and went out, and Mr. Goldsmith, throwing himself upon a chair, covered his face with his hands.

"This is terrible—terrible!" he said, in deeply agitated tones, "but I am powerless. My good name is at stake if I refuse to comply. That skeleton of the past will be brought out, and my daughter will suffer the shame of seeing her father stand disgraced before the world. It is better far that she be dealt with a little severely now than that she be allowed to share my disgrace."

"As God is my witness, I believed my former wife to be dead when I married Charlotte's mother, but now at this late day I learn that she is alive. And unless I force Charlotte to marry Thorne Oldwood, or at least use my best influence with her, Boniface Dillingsworth threatens to tell the world that secret of the past and bring shame and disgrace down upon my head."

"By heavens! I almost begin to believe there was more in poor Edmund's peculiar spells than I ever imagined, and I actually fear this sleek and fat-chinned saint. But that does not lessen the danger of the position in which I stand. The mine upon which my feet rest is likely to be fired at any moment. No, no, I must obey him, and Charlotte must obey me."

"It is not so bad as it might be, however, when I reflect that Thorne Oldwood is of good family, and he seems to be a gentleman in all respects. I am glad, though, to see Charlotte's show such spirit, and if she will hold out and utterly defeat us, she will save me; for surely I cannot be expected to perform what is impossible. Unless she do so, though, she shall obey me, for I cannot afford to be lenient in any degree."

A servant announced Boniface Dillingsworth.

"Show him in," Mr. Goldsmith ordered, and in a moment he was there.

"Good-morning," the sleek rascal said, as he shook hands; "how do I find you?"

"Well, I thank you," was the reply; "and how are you?"

"The same. How is your charming daughter?"

"She is well, but I fear she will give me trouble this morning."

"How so?"

"Let us come at once to business, since Oldwood and the minister will soon be here."

"As you like."

"As I said, I fear my daughter is inclined to disobey me. I have told her what is required of her, and shall use my best efforts to make her do my will. Of course I can do no more, and if I fail, it is not to be supposed that you will hold me accountable."

"I hold you accountable!" Boniface exclaimed.

"Yes; have you not threatened to—"

"My dear Burton," the saintly rascal resented, "how can you say so? It is I who am trying to save you. Surely there is a misunderstanding. Did I not tell you it is the young man, Oldwood, who, having learned the secret in some way, threatens to expose you unless he can win Charlotte's hand? It is possible that in my excitement, and in my earnest desire to serve you, I have not expressed the case clearly; but to think you could suspect me—"

"Pardon me, Boniface, if I wrong you; it must be as you say! But I did not understand it as you explain it now."

"Then you see now how hopeless it is. If Charlotte refuses, Thorne will at once do his worst. It is my desire to save you that leads me to urge the match. And, after all, can she make a better one? He threatens you, but it is only because of his great love for your daughter, and—"

"And you think he would not carry out the threat?"

"Not so. In case of failure, his love would excite a desire for revenge. If he cannot possess your daughter, he will expose the secret as surely as the earth moves. It is human nature."

"Then she must marry him."

Just then Thorne Oldwood and the expected minister were announced.

They were ushered in, and then Mr. Goldsmith directed the servant to call Charlotte.

Charlotte came down, accompanied by Mrs. Clementine.

"This is my daughter," said Mr. Goldsmith, addressing the minister. "I desire her to marry this gentleman, Mr. Thorne Oldwood. My reasons for so private and informal a wedding is my dislike for public show. You will please to proceed with the ceremony."

Meantime, the moment Charlotte had entered the room her eyes met those of Boniface, and he exerted his full magnetic power upon her.

Mrs. Clementine saw with alarm that she was helplessly in his power.

"The couple will please rise," the minister directed, "stand before me, and join hands."

Thorne Oldwood took hold of the girl's hand and led her forward, she offering no resistance.

The preliminary questions were asked, and Charlotte signified, almost mechanically, her willingness to become the wife of the man who held her hand.

Mrs. Clementine saw that she must interfere, and said, firmly:

"I forbid this marriage. Can you not see, sir," to the minister, "that Miss Goldsmith is being forced into this?"

"Can this be true?" the minister inquired, turning to Mr. Goldsmith.

The latter, pale and agitated, said:

"Let my daughter speak for herself."

"Are you taking this step of your own volition, and do you desire to become this man's wife?" the man of God asked; and Charlotte, her eyes fixed upon those of Boniface, answered: "I do."

"She does not!" Mrs. Clementine cried. "She is already married—she is the wife of Clarence Dillingsworth, and here is her certificate to prove it!"

Had a bomb of dynamite been hurled into their midst, their surprise could not have been greater.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT BECAME OF EDMUND.

WHEN Edmund Dillingsworth, under the influence of chloroform, was carried off by the two men, immediately after the attack upon the detective and his unfortunate defeat, he was taken to a carriage that was waiting at some distance away.

Into that carriage he was hurriedly placed, Alexis Knight following him.

Knight turned, then paid the two men each a previously-stipulated sum of money, bade them good-night, and the carriage started off.

Seated in the carriage was Boniface Dillingsworth.

As soon as he and Knight had placed Edmund on the back seat so that he would not fall, Knight remarked:

"Well, it worked like a charm."

"Had no difficulty, eh?" Boniface inquired.

"No, none whatever."

"Did that valet of his follow?"

"Yes; but the men dropped him, and I guess he will be a subject for the hospital or the Morgue."

"Serves him right, and it little matters which. Did you caution the men not to return?"

"Yes; but no doubt they will, to search his pockets."

"Well, it makes little difference, as we will never see them again. Are you sure, though, that the valet did not recognize you?"

"No fear of that, disguised as I am."

"No, I suppose not; but I have been thinking it would have been better to make cold meat of him while we were about it."

"You may be right, but I think there is nothing to fear. Besides, I do not like the idea of killing."

ing to fear. Besides, I do not like the idea of killing."

"You are too chicken-hearted. Still, as you say, there is nothing to fear. It is next to impossible for the fellow to have recognized you, and if he should appear against us our word will be taken before his. The only other point is, did any one else see our man cross the ferry?"

"I think not. I looked around very closely, but saw no one I knew, and no one appeared to notice him. He came this way as though the Old Boy were pulling him."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Boniface laughed, "the 'Old Boy' was pulling him. I have been sitting here for an hour or more, exerting my mental powers to the utmost to call him this way. It is the hardest work a man can do. I feel as though I had spent a whole night at hard study."

"It must be a strain, surely."

The carriage rolled on, and in due time arrived at the ferry.

There the toll was paid by the driver, and he drove aboard the boat, landing ere long at Twenty-third street, where Mr. Dillingsworth had taken passage so short a time previously.

The driver turned away toward the western part of the city at once, and on reaching one of the main thoroughfares, started north.

Finally, when he stopped again, it was at the little gate in the wall which inclosed the "Home," or retreat, of Father Boniface and his clan.

Alexis Knight and Boniface alighted, and Knight rung the bell.

The gate was opened presently, and Knight went in, returning ere long accompanied by two men bearing a light stretcher.

The unconscious man was lifted from the carriage, then laid upon the stretcher, and the two men bore him away.

A policeman had approached to learn what was going on.

"A sick man?" he inquired, addressing Boniface.

"Yes," Boniface answered, "quite sick. He is a poor old man to whom our attention was called, and as he had no home or friends, we have brought him here."

"Which is very kind of you, and very fortunate for him, sir."

"We are doing only our duty," the wily rascal returned, with a very saint-like air, "and I am only sorry we cannot do more."

"Sure, you are an honor to the city. We can't have too many such institutions, sir. May Heaven bless you in your work."

"Amen," Boniface exclaimed, earnestly.

The officer passed on, Boniface making a grimace after him, and Knight having settled with their driver, the carriage rolled away, and the pair entered the grounds and shut the gate.

The driver, by the way, was not in the secret, unless he was sharp enough to guess the truth.

He had been engaged to go to Brooklyn and bring over a "sick man," and had been told nothing more. The attack, it will be remembered, was not made in sight of where the carriage waited.

If he was shrewd enough to guess, or even to care to guess, any more, his mental capacity belied his appearance.

Boniface was too wary to engage a driver for such work who had signs of too much mental aptness about him.

In this instance the driver he had chosen had rather the appearance of being remarkably dull.

When Boniface and Knight entered the house, the two men had set their burden down in the hall, and were awaiting further orders.

"Where to now, Father?" they asked.

"To my room," Boniface replied.

The stretcher was lifted up again and carried forward, and its bearers followed Knight into Boniface's room.

"Put it down," Boniface ordered.

They obeyed.

"And now you may retire," the general of the Order added, dismissing them.

The two men bowed and went out, and Boniface locked the door.

"Well, where to now?" inquired the younger man.

"To room number four, in the silent hall," was the answer. "Light a lamp."

The room was already illumined, but Knight obeyed the order and lighted a lamp.

They had use for it.

Opening a hidden door, then, which disclosed to view a steep downward flight of stairs, Boniface ordered:

"Take the lamp down and on to the end of the hall, place it on the ground, unlock and open the door of the room, and then come back."

Knight started to obey.

Descending the stairs, a long, dark and narrow hall lay before him.

Along this he proceeded for some distance, and then he came to another flight of steps.

This time it led upward.

Ascending, a continuation of the hall was entered, and near the head of the stairs was a door on the left.

This was passed, and also a second and a third.

At the fourth one, however, which was near the end of the hall, Knight stopped.

This was room four, the one Boniface had mentioned.

Knight unlocked and opened the door, glanced in, and then put the lamp down in the hall and returned.

A good judge of distance, and one knowing the plan of the house and grounds, could not have failed to notice that the hall just traversed was an underground passage leading from the "Home" to the end of the large warehouse in the rear which faced the street on that side of the block.

Such was the case.

These four rooms were in one end of that building, which, by the way, was owned by the Order, *sub rosa*, and more than once had they been used for purposes similar to that for which No. 4 was now about to be employed.

When Knight returned, he and Boniface lifted the stretcher and carried it down the stairs, through the passage, and up to the designated room.

Then Knight brought in the lamp and they looked around them.

The room was low and square, and was scantily furnished.

It had more the appearance of a prison cell, though it was somewhat larger.

The floor was of wood, but the sides were of brick and stone, and overhead could be seen the rough beams of the floor above.

There was but one window, and that was very small and was high from the floor. It had four small panes, and behind it were two strong iron bars.

"So far so good," Boniface chuckled, as he glanced around. "This room can hold a stronger man than he."

"It has held stronger men," Knight responded, "and men a great deal more desperate."

"Right you are. Oh! we are on the road to victory now, and soon we shall be master of millions. Is it not an immense thought?"

"It is grand."

"Well, catch hold, and we'll toss the old dolt upon the bed and leave him to pleasant dreams. Ha, ha, ha!"

They lifted Edmund from the stretcher none too carefully, and placing him on the bed, left him there and went out, taking the stretcher with them and locking the door after them.

Edmund slept right on until morning.

When he awoke the sun was just looking in through the little window and throwing its warm beams upon the bed where he lay.

He sat up at once and looked around.

Where could he be?

A moment later the door opened and a rough-looking man entered with some breakfast for him.

"Where am I?" Edmund asked.

"You're in th' 'asylum," was the reply; "and what's more, you want ter understand it, too. I don't want no more such capers as you've been a-cuttin' up fer th' past week or two."

"In an asylum," Edmund gasped; "when was I sent here?"

"Oh! several weeks ago. Now fer th' love o' goodness shut up and don't go over th' same old questions again. Here's yer grub, so fall to an' fill up."

The poor old gentleman was bewildered.

Had it come to this at last? Was he really in an asylum, and had he been there, as this man said, for weeks?

He could not believe it.

Try as he would to collect his thoughts, he could not connect the past with the present so as to form any correct idea of time.

He might have been there for days or for years.

"Are you telling me the truth?" he demanded.

"In course I am!" the man cried. "D'ye s'pose I've got any object in lyin' to ye? If I had my way I'd have ye bounced out o' here in short order. I reckon yer folks pays well fer yer keep, though."

"My folks? Whom do you mean?"

"Why, yer son an' yer darter, as I s'pose they be. They fetched ye here and said nobody was ter be allowed ter see ye. I reckon as how you are here fer keeps. But, come, eat yer grub."

"Do you mean to tell me that I am confined here by my beloved nephew and niece, and that by their orders I am allowed to see no one?"

"Then they ain't yer own children, eh? But, it's all th' same. No doubt you've got a boodle that they're after, and so they want ye out o' the way. I don't know how it is, but as ter th' facts o' th' case, them's jest as I said."

"Man, you lie!" Mr. Dillingsworth cried. "Your tongue is as false as your heart is black! I demand my release from here, and at once. Stand aside, now, and let me pass. Do you hear? Stand aside, I say, and let me go!"

"Hold yer hosses now, gov'nor," the man admonished, as he backed toward the door, waving the old gentleman back with his hand; "hold yer hosses! There's yer grub, and when ye git hungry enough mebbey you'll eat it. I'll call ag'in about supper-time. Ta-ta!" And blowing a mocking kiss from his fingers he dodged out and locked the door.

CHAPTER XXV.

A CANINE MESSENGER.

So Edmund Dillingsworth's imprisonment began.

Boniface was playing a deep game, and his intention can be seen.

He desired to have Edmund believe that he owed his incarceration to Clarence and Effie, in order to poison his mind against them.

If he could succeed in doing this, he felt that he would be sure of his brother's property.

Further, at the right time, he would come to the rescue and release the unhappy man from the living tomb, the "asylum," into which his "ungrateful nephew and niece" had placed him.

Practically, we have seen Boniface declare this to be his intention.

"Edmund will be found when near his death," he has declared, "and will make his will in my favor and die."

Surely he had some evil design, and some evil scheme at work.

The above words, it will be recalled, were uttered after the old gentleman had been missing for some time, and when his friends were giving up all hopes of ever seeing him again.

But, to return.

When his jailer left the room, on that first morning of his imprisonment, Edmund sunk down upon a chair in despair.

For the moment he gave up all hope.

He believed, and rightly, that he owed his misfortune to the evil nature of his brother Boniface.

For a long time he sat silent in thought.

Could it be true that he had been confined in that cell as long as his jailer had said?

No, that was a lie!

The place was wholly unfamiliar to him.

He had never seen it before.

What was more, he was dressed. He had not slept in the bed, but on it—that is, outside the covering.

This discovery led him to search for further proof of the falseness of the man's statement.

He looked at his watch.

It was running, but he found that it had nearly run down. This went to prove that he had not wound it at his bed-hour on the previous night, as had been his rule for years.

Then, too, there was mud on his shoes that was still damp.

And if further proof were wanting, he found it in the fact that there was a coating of dust upon every object in the room. Had he been the occupant of that room for weeks, this dust would have been removed, by use, from the chairs at least.

This little burst of philosophical and detective-like reasoning refreshed his mind and sharpened his appetite.

The meal that had been brought to him consisted of hot coffee and rolls, backed with a chop and some crisp potatoes, and the aroma of the coffee called his attention to the table.

He knew it would be folly to refuse to eat, so he drew up a chair, brushed the dust from it, and sat down.

Had he known that he was taking a small quantity of a slow poison with every mouthful of the coffee he would have relished the repast less.

As it was, he ate heartily, and was quite refreshed.

Some time later, though, he began to feel ill, and presently was forced to lie down.

His head pained, and his mind was confused.

After an hour or two, however, he felt better again, and rose and made a thorough examination of his prison cell.

It was as we have described it, and a very comfortless and cheerless place indeed.

Naturally, the prisoner desired to learn what could be seen from the window.

Pulling the table over to that side of the room, he got up on it and looked out.

But the view he obtained was far from satisfactory.

The wall was quite thick, and the bars being on the inner side, the view was naturally limited to a very small portion of the opposite side of the street.

The building opposite was on a corner, and on the portion of it that could be seen was the sign:

"ENIZIGAMS, RENBIRCS & CO."

Peculiar names, certainly, but so the sign read.

Mr. Dillingsworth tried in every way to locate his position, but failed to do so. He could not see the name of the street, nor could he see the number of the opposite building.

The day passed slowly, and when evening came he was faint with hunger.

As his jailer had intimated in the morning, no dinner had been provided for him, and the man did not appear again until it was almost dark.

When he came then he was followed by a little dog that sprung into the room and frisked about in a most lively manner. It was about as homely a cur as can well be imagined, but it was dyed a peculiar fashionable color, and around its neck was a gold-mounted collar on which was the name—"Claude."

But more about "Claude" presently.

The man carried a steaming-hot dinner, with which was another cup of the delightfully fragrant coffee.

"Do you intend to starve me?" the old gentleman demanded.

"Does this here lay-out look like it?" the jailer counterquestioned.

"I mean by limiting me to two meals a day?"

"Oh! I see. Can't help that, ye know, boss; it's th' doctor's orders."

"The doctor's! What doctor's?"

"Th' doctor of th' 'asylum."

"Why does he order it?"

"Give it up. Reckon it must be fer th' good o' yer health. But, come, you'd better fall to an' eat while ye kin see, fer ye ain't ter have no light in here."

With these words the man picked up the other tray of dishes, kicked the gaudy dog out of the room, said "good-night," and went away, carefully locking the door.

Mr. Dillingsworth was too hungry not to heed the advice, and "fell to" as directed.

An hour later he was again ill, and retired to bed.

Next morning he awoke with an aching head and feverish tongue, and felt weak and miserable.

The poison was doing its work.

Several days passed, and the poor old gentleman was ill indeed.

He was confined to his bed, and ate little or nothing.

All this while, too, his jailer had been dropping a word now and then to poison his mind against Clarence and Effie.

"Them precious relations o' yours was here to-day to pay fer yer keep," he said, on one occasion, "an' they handed over th' dollars mighty stingy-like, I kin tell ye. Th' gal said she hoped ye wasn't goin' ter live ferever."

But such a statement as this bore the stamp of falsehood on its face.

Mr. Dillingsworth listened because he was obliged to, but he did not believe, though he no longer made any response.

One morning he upset his coffee.

This, of itself, was a trifling incident, but it meant everything—even life—to the prisoner.

Before night he felt better.

Then came the thought, which he uttered aloud:

"Heavens! can it be that I am being poisoned?"

A cold perspiration broke out upon his face, and he trembled like an aspen leaf.

Calm reflection showed him how easy it would be for an enemy to put poison into his food, and his coffee was most likely to be chosen as the vehicle.

He resolved to drink no more of it for a day or two, and study the result.

That night, and also the next morning and the following night, he poured his coffee into the waste-drain and drank only water, with which his room was freely supplied by means of pipe.

At the end of that time he felt a decided improvement, and believed that his worst suspicion was confirmed.

He took care, however, not to let his jailer see that he was better, but on the contrary tried to lead him to believe that he was growing worse.

On one occasion he asked why a doctor was not sent to him, and along in the afternoon one (Knight in disguise) came.

He examined the prisoner, said it was nothing but a trifling indisposition, left a little medicine, and went away again.

This confirmed Edmund's suspicions even more fully than ever, and then he began to think of some plan of escape.

One question that he was continually asking himself was, where was the detective he had employed? He had recalled all the incidents of that night of adventure by this time, and knew that his valet had been with him. Had they killed him?

He had written several letters to Clarence, Effie, and Boniface, taking care to be guarded in what he said, but not a line or word did he attempt to send to Gilbert of Gotham. He knew it would be useless to do so.

And so the days passed.

He was served with two meals a day, morning and night, the homely but gaudy little dog coming with the jailer occasionally to break the monotony with its frisking and barking, and its being kicked out when the jailer departed; the coffee was poured into the waste-drain daily; he, the prisoner, continued to grow weaker all the time, seemingly; and so the days passed.

One morning, the morning on which Clarence Dillingsworth set out to go to the office of the detective whose receipt he had found, the jailer entered the cell with a new air and manner.

He put the breakfast-tray down on the table, and then advancing to the bed where the prisoner lay, drew a twenty-dollar bill from his pocket, spread it out carefully, and remarked:

"D'ye see this here double-X?"

Mr. Dillingsworth responded that he did.

"Well," said the jailer, "this little billy-dook makes me yer friend. I'm goin' to git ye out o' here afore many days. You don't want ter give

th' racket away, though, if anybody 'sides me comes in here—th' doctor, f'rinstance."

"What do you mean?" Edmund feebly inquired.

"Jest read this an' ye'll see th' hull thing," and he handed a slip of paper to the old gentleman.

Edmund opened it and read:

"DEAR EDMUND:—

"I have, after patient search, just discovered where you are. Be hopeful, and I will rescue you. I have succeeded in bribing your jailer, and I think we can trust him. BONIFACE."

The old gentleman was not deceived, but he pretended to be.

"Thank Heaven," he said aloud, "my dear brother is true to me."

"Bet yer life he is," the jailer emphatically declared, "and we mean ter have ye out o' here spite of 'em all."

On this occasion the little dog had followed the jailer into the room, and when the man went out the dog remained.

When Mr. Dillingsworth discovered that it had been left with him, a new idea came into his mind like a revelation. Could he not write something, secure it to the dog's collar, and drop the little animal from the window?

He had often thought of opening the little window and calling for help, but upon reflecting that if he was in a genuine asylum no attention would be paid to him, had as often given up the idea. It had never before occurred to him to throw out a letter.

He was well supplied with paper, etc., as stated, and a message was soon written and tied to the dog's neck. Then he opened the window, and the next moment the little dog was dropped to the sidewalk.

The envelope secured to its neck was addressed to Nathan Gilbert, the detective.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A HAPPY MOUSE.

"BUT, Mithter Jaybird, I cawn't thtand it, don't ye know; I cawn't, weally."

E. Claude Montpensier.

It was on the same morning of which the ending of the preceding chapter treats.

He had called at the office of Mr. Jonathan Jaybird to inquire whether anything had been learned concerning the lost dog, and the pettifogger had made a demand for another fee.

"Well, Mr. Montpensier," the lawyer responded, as he threw himself back in his chair carelessly, "that is for you to determine. After having gone so far, though, it seems to me folly to call the detectives off when they are just getting on the right track."

"But, Mithter Jaybird," the dude complained, "you mutht wectet that I have already paid you a hundwed and theventy-five dollahs."

"Quite true; but you must remember, sir, that you are employing first-class talent. I could put inferior men on the case for half the money, sir, but I will not do it. When a gentleman comes here, and I pride myself upon being able to tell a real gentleman at first glance, I give him the best service I can."

"Yeth, quite twue, quite twue."

"Now, these men have been hard at work, day and night, in your interest; and now when they are at the very door of success you want to call them off and give the case up. It seems to me like folly to throw so much money away for nothing, and— But, pardon me, it is your business and not mine."

"Oh! good heaventh, Mithter Jaybird, I don't want to give up; bleth you, no! But I weally think it ith time the dawg wath found if it ith ever going to be found."

"Rome was not built in a day, sir, Rome was not built in a day; and the peculiar circumstances under which that dog was lost make the case all the more difficult. You can see that for yourself."

"Yeth, quite twue, quite twue."

"But it is for you to decide. If you want to give up the case without any return for your money, I will send word to my men to—"

"Oh! but I don't, thir; haven't I told you I don't?"

"Well, then, it will be necessary to advance another trifling sum to—"

"How much, thir, how much?" E. Claude asked nervously.

"Well, say seventy-five dol— No, I'll call it fifty. I'm interested in the case, my dear sir, and I'm disposed to do the fair thing by you. I'll try and beat them down a little. Call it fifty dollars, and if I can't get them to come down any I'll stand the loss myself. You see, I am not forgetting that the honor of serving you is worth something, Mr. Montpensier."

"Aw—quite twue, quite twue indeed."

"Then you will have the case carried on for another week?"

"Yeth, yeth, by all meanth. You thee, thir, that dawg mutht be found. All my future happineth dependth on it. Here, here ith the fifty dollahs, and now pleath athk your men to bwing the matter to a quick and thuccethful end."

"I will do so, sir, and with pleasure," the silver-tongued rascal exclaimed, as his fingers closed greedily over the crisp notes; "and I

earnestly hope that next time you call I shall have good news for you."

"Aw—yeth, and tho do I," E. Claude declared as he watched his money disappear into the lawyer's pocket.

Had the dude been of an observing turn of mind he would have noticed that the lawyer was wearing a suit of new clothes, and that a new hat and a new cane reposed on the desk before him.

Had he noticed these things his suspicions might have been aroused; but he did not.

Leaving the office as he had left his money, but with more likelihood of seeing it again, he went to call upon the object of his devotion.

He found her at home, and she seemed highly pleased to see him.

"Aw—my deah Mith' De Thmythe," he exclaimed on entering her presence, "I am *tho* delighted to thee you! How do I find you to-day? Have you weally wecovered from that awful fwright?"

"Oh, yes, I am fully recovered now, as I have assured you time and again. Why do you not try to forget it?"

"Forget it—never! Why, I know no peath' of mind by night or by day! It wath twuly tewwible! But, I have called to tell you that I now have vewy thtrong hopeth of wecovering poor, dear little Claude. My detective tellth me that he ith now on the wight twail, and that in a few dayth amotht the deah little fellah th'all be wethtored'to you."

"How good you are! But I really wish you would forget—"

"Never!"

"But, Claude must be dead, and it is only a waste of money to—"

"Money! Why, *deah* Mith' De Thmythe, I would lay out my whole fortune, if netheth'awy! I have only paid about two hundred and twenty-five dollath—a mere nothing."

"Oh! it is something, and I do hope you will pay out no more. See, I have taken off my half-mourning, I only wore it ten days anyhow; and the dog is now almost forgotten."

"Oh! how can you thay that, when the deah cweature wath named after me? You pain me more than I can tell."

"Pardon me—pray do; I did not think what I was saying. I would not wound your feelings for worlds and worlds. Indeed I would not."

"Thankth—thankth awfully; you have healed the bleeding wound alwady with your kind wordth. But do not athk me to give up my th'earch f'r your deah little pet, for I cannot do it. I will wethtore the dawg to your armth, if I have to overturn the earth to do it. I will, bah Jove!"

"What a dear, good fellow you are, Claudie—Oh! pardon! I mean Mr. Montpensier."

"Thankth, oh! thankth awfully! I am thure I do not detherve tho much kindneth', after all I have done."

"But I have forgiven you—freely and fully forgiven you."

"That do'th not make good the gweat loth' you have thuffered, though, *deah* An— I mean Mith' De Thmythe, and until I can wethtore your lotht pet, I th'all know no peath' of mind. I am the motht mitherable cweature on earth to-day, and I th'all never be happy again till poor little Claude ith found. No, never; bah Jove, no!"

After considerable more talk of the same sort, E. Claude took his leave, and as he walked away from the house he muttered:

"Oh! that I *might* find the demmed little cur, tho that I could athk *deah* Antoinette to be mine."

And Antoinette, as she watched him trotting away, thought:

"In my twenty-ninth year, and still unmarried. Will he *never* ask me the question?"

Poor E. Claude!

But, to return to Jonathan Jaybird.

In justice to him it must be said that he was not taking his client's money without making an effort to earn it—or some of it at least.

He had made inquiries, as has been stated, concerning the exact place where the big dog had made the attack upon the little one, in what direction the little dog had been carried off, had obtained descriptions of the bold marauder and its victim, etc.

On several occasions since, he had employed a young man of his acquaintance to go to that neighborhood to see what could be learned.

This young man, who was one of the "boys" of the Bowery, was called "The Mouse."

On his first excursion in his new *role* as dog-detective, The Mouse had the good fortune to find the big dog and learn where it belonged, but that was all he could learn.

He found several persons who had witnessed the laughable incident, but he could not find the missing dog.

On subsequent visits he had confined his attention to a beer saloon.

Had the lost Claude strayed in there, he would have been found; but not otherwise.

The Mouse received two dollars for each day he was engaged in the lawyer's service, and as so much money represented so many "beers," he called at the office daily.

It was only on every second or third day, however, that he was engaged.

On this morning, barely had E. Claude Montpensier left the lawyer's office when The Mouse entered.

He made it a point to watch for the dude, and to lose no time in making his appearance after his departure.

"Hullo, Old Rocks!" he exclaimed, "how is biz?"

"Good-morning, Mouse," the lawyer responded; "you're just in time."

"That so?"

"Yes."

"Jest in time fer what?"

"I want you to make another search for that lost dog."

"Do, hey? Well, jest fork over th' two dollars, an' I'm yer gooseberry."

"Don't you think two dol—"

"A little steep? No, sir! It's two dollars or nothin'. That's yer whine every day, but it won't go down. I'll bet you git more'n ten dollars out o' th' case."

"Only five, Mouse, only five I assure you."

"Well, I want two of 'em, or it's no go. I'm doin' all th' work, anyhow."

"Oh! well—here, take it. And now be off with you and do your best. Remember my promise. If you find the cur and bring it here in good shape I'll give you five dollars spot cash. Now, git."

"All right, uncle, I'm off; and I reckon if that dog is ter be found, I kin find it. Tra-la-laloo."

The Mouse retired with a sweeping bow, and left the building.

"This is a reg'lar snap," he mused, as he walked away. "Two dollars means another jolly all-day booze in that up-town saloon. I reckon I'll nurse this job fer all it's worth. I reckon I'll ride up, too," he thought, as he boarded a car. "If I walk I'll be too tired to enjoy myself properly, to say nothin' about th' argus duties I have ter preform."

In due time he reached his destination, the saloon in the neighborhood of where the dog had been lost, and he entered at once and took a morning bracer.

Then he concluded that he would walk around the block just once, before he settled down for the day, so that he could say he had earned his money. Then he would have nothing on his mind.

Accordingly he set out.

Little did he imagine that his labor was to be rewarded with success, but it was.

Barely had he gone half a block when he espied a little dog running toward him from the opposite direction.

It was a homely cur of a most peculiar color, and tied to its neck was what seemed to be a piece of paper carefully folded.

"Hang me if here don't come a cur of th' very sort I'm lookin' fer!" The Mouse exclaimed.

"Reckon I'll have ter ketch it an' see if it ain't th' one."

Waiting until the dog was quite close to him, he made a sudden grab and caught it.

The first thing he looked at was the collar.

Yes, sure enough, there was the name—"Claude."

"Bully fer me!" The Mouse cried. "I reckon my star o' good-luck must be purty high this month. Here's th' dog, sure enough; an' now I'll make th' most of my chance. I'll play old Jaybird, or Jailbird, fer a sucker as long as there's anything ter git out o' him, an' then I'll make my own bargain wi' that dude feller. He's softer'n soft soap, *that* feller is, an' I reckon I kin play him fer an X, easy. But, what's this letter that's tied to th' purp's collar?"

Cutting the string that secured it, he soon had the missive in his hands.

It proved to be a sealed envelope, and was directed to "Nathan Gilbert, Private Detective, No. —, Broadway."

It took The Mouse several minutes to spell this out, for his education was decidedly limited, but at last he mastered it.

"Great cats!" he exclaimed, "but this is somethin' of a mystery! I know Gilbert o' Gotham, I know him well! He once secured me a whole summer's board at Isle de Blackwell. My bill o' health is clean at present, an' I reckon I'll call round an' see him. I may be able ter make a stake. I'm in clover anyhow, even if this letter don't 'mount to anything; I'll hold onter th' dog, play old Jaybird fer th' two dollars as long as I kin, an' then I'll go fer th' dude. I'm happy as a clam! Sorry I can't take my all-day booze, but biz first, allus."

With these reflections passing in his mind, The Mouse started down-town with the dog under his arm and the letter in his pocket.

CHAPTER XXVII.

GILBERT OF GOTHAM.

WHEN Gilbert of Gotham entered the employ of Mr. Dillingsworth as "David James, valet," he took especial care to conceal his identity.

The initials of his assumed name were stamped upon his linen, and he carried nothing in his pockets from which his true character could be guessed.

Reasons had he for this, and obvious ones.

And to this fact, in the main, was due his mysterious silence and absence.

When knocked down by the two hired ruffians on the night of Mr. Dillingsworth's abduction, he was seriously hurt.

But, let us return to that night at once.

When the two rascals had been paid by Alexis Knight, and the carriage rolled away, they turned back toward the place where they had left the victim of their attack.

"This here's a purty good stake, Jim, fer sich an easy job; don't ye think so?" one remarked, as he put his money into his pocket.

"It be, fer a fact, Gib, an' no mistake 'bout *that*," the other replied.

"No trouble 'bout it er tall."

"Not a bit."

"An' now what 'bout th' bloke we laid out?"

"What ye mean?"

"Why, ye know th' feller said we better hadn't not fer go back where we left him, fer fear th' p'lice might twig our shadders."

"It is a leetle resky, that's so; an' bein' as we're off all O. K., an' th' boodle is collared, I reckon we'd best not go back that way. What say?"

They stopped to debate the question.

"That's all so," Jim admitted, "but see what we may be losin'. That feller may have some good sound dollars in his pocket, ter say nothin' 'bout a tucker an' chain."

"Sure 'nough; but ain't it best ter leave good enough alone?"

"It is takin' a chance, in course; but it ain't sech a resk as th' first job was, an' if he should happen ter have a cool hundred—"

"Come on; we'll see th' game out if it sends us up."

The point settled, they passed on.

They took the precaution to walk on the opposite side of the street, however, and when they came to the place opposite to where their victim lay, they stopped.

No one was in sight, and the street was dark and silent.

"What d'ye think?" queried he called Gib.

"Ther coast seems clear," Jim replied.

"Shell we resk it?"

"Yes, come on."

They lost no more time, then, but crossed the street at once.

The valet still lay where he had fallen, and was still unconscious.

It took the two rascals but a short time to go through his pockets.

Some money was found, but not a very great amount; a silver watch with a cheap chain; a revolver, and some trifling articles, such as a knife, a pencil, etc.

The rascals spared nothing.

It took them but a few moments to do their work, and then they hastened from the scene with all the haste consistent with caution.

An hour later the unconscious man was found by a policeman.

At first the officer thought he was drunk and asleep, but he soon found out his mistake, and whistled for assistance.

In a short time another policeman came, and between them they carried the man to the nearest station.

An ambulance was then sent for, and within half an hour from the time of his being found, the detective was in a hospital.

Next morning one of the city papers had this brief item:

"Watchman, What of the Night?"

"At a late hour last night, Policeman B—, of the C— Street Station, found a man lying unconscious on the sidewalk on D— street. He called for assistance, and the man was carried to the station, and thence to the — Hospital. There were two wounds on his head, and he had been robbed of everything. The man is not known, and the only clew to his identity are the letters 'D. J.' upon his shirt and collar. He may die."

That was all, and, like almost all such cases, the paper did not speak of it again.

For two days the man was unconscious most of the time, but on the third day he showed signs of rapid improvement.

On that morning there came a man to the hospital, a tall man in black, who desired to see the man to whom the newspaper item, which he had brought with him, referred.

He was shown to the bed where the wounded detective lay.

Gilbert was apparently asleep.

"Do you recognize him?" was asked.

"Yes," was the reply, "he is Daniel Johnson, a clerk."

It will be seen that this fictitious name fitted to the printed initials in the newspaper item—"D. J."

"Will you stay until he awakes?" the attendant asked.

"Yes," was the answer. "He is a friend of mine."

"Very well; only do not talk too much to him."

The tall man in black promised not to do so, and sat down.

As it happened, there were only two other patients in the same ward, and neither of these was near to where the detective lay.

No sooner had the attendant gone out, than Gilbert of Gotham opened his eyes, saying, in a low tone:

"Johns."

The tall man in black was looking around the room at the moment, and the word caused him to start.

He turned instantly, and, in a tone as low as the other's, exclaimed:

"Gilbert."

The detective chief smiled.

"This is one on me," he remarked.

"So it seems," Johns agreed. "But," he questioned, "why did you pretend to be asleep?"

"Can't you see?"

"No; unless you feared I would blurt out your real name."

"That was it, exactly."

"I thought you knew me better than that."

"I did not want to take any chances on even a sure thing. I don't want to let it be known who I am, you see."

"So I thought you'd say, and for that reason I called you Daniel Johnson. Don't forget your new name, and that you are a clerk."

"No, I shall stick to it. It would have made it awkward for you, though, if I had given another name previously."

"I knew you had not, however. I was particular to inquire."

"That settles it, Johns. I see you are not to be caught."

"Not in so simple a matter, anyhow. But, what of yourself—how badly are you hurt?"

"Pretty badly, I fear."

"Not dangerously, I hope."

"I guess not. But how came you to learn I was here? And what is going on? What became of Dillingsworth?"

"Dillingsworth is missing."

"As I feared."

"Yes, and the police are searching everywhere for a clew."

"And cannot find one?"

"Not one."

"Well, what of you?"

"I will tell you in a few words. When I learned that Mr. Dillingsworth and his valet were missing, I was, I must admit, more interested in the valet than in the master. I began to look around. I took up the papers of the next morning after your disappearance, and looked them through. I found two accounts of bodies found in the river, and went to see them. Neither one was you or Dillingsworth. I visited all the hospitals, but with no success. Then I got more papers of same date, and in one of them I found this," reading the item.

"Pretty well done, Johns; and if the police do as well, they will soon find me out."

"Then you do not want them to, eh?"

"No; I want to be missing."

"Then you must be taken from here."

"I do not believe I will be allowed to go at present."

"Then you will have to take the chances."

"I suppose so. And now pay attention. Mr. Dillingsworth has got to be found and rescued."

"Undoubtedly."

"And, until I am able to get out, you must handle the case."

"Very well, I will do my best."

"No doubt of that; and you will have the advantage of the police, for I can give you a clew."

"Good! let me hear it."

"It is this: Alexis Knight knows where Edmund Dillingsworth is. You must shadow him night and day."

"It shall be done."

"You know I gave you about all the points in the case; and—"

Here they were interrupted by the coming in of the attendant and a physician.

No further opportunity was given to talk any more upon the subject.

Johns inquired concerning the extent of the patient's injuries, and was pleased to learn that they were not by any means so serious as had at first been supposed. The doctor added, too, that, if his friends insisted upon it, he might be removed to his home next day and placed under the care of a private physician.

This was done.

That is to say, on the following morning the detective was removed to the home of his assistant, Johns, where he received the best of care and where he could direct the movements of the men at work on the case.

A week later and Gilbert of Gotham again took the reins in his own hands.

But he worked in secret.

He, as well as James, the valet, was missing. At his office no one knew where he was when asked.

He seemed to have disappeared as suddenly and as completely as had Mr. Dillingsworth and his valet.

There was method in all this. It was done to allay the suspicions of Father Boniface and his clan, if they had had suspicions as to who the valet was.

The case of Dillingsworth, however, remained a mystery profound.

Search as the detectives would, they could not find him.

Alexis Knight had been shadowed day and night, but while many of his crooked ways were

learned, no clew could be gained from him as to the whereabouts of the old gentleman.

Suspicion pointed to the "Home," but no proof could be brought to support it.

As for Boniface, he was a saint—to all appearances. No one mourned the lost man more than he.

The time was coming, though, when the mystery would be laid bare and that arch rascal would be dethroned.

Not only was Gilbert of Gotham hard at work, but he had called some of his best assistants, male and female, to his aid.

The entire Order of the Occident, almost, was under keen surveillance.

That there was truth in the strange story Mr. Dillingsworth had told the detective at their first interview, no sane man could any longer doubt.

But the detective had long since put all doubt aside.

Not only did he believe, but he was gaining proof every day of the rottenness of the Order of which Boniface Dillingsworth was the head.

He failed, however, to find Edmund. No clew could be unearthed, and the trail ended where he had been attacked by the two men on the night when he had followed the old gentleman to Brooklyn.

He was about to make some decisive move, when other events occurred which caused him to change his plans.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SUSPICIONS CONFIRMED.

WHEN Mrs. Clementine made so startling an assertion, and produced the marriage certificate to prove her words, the shock of surprise that followed cannot be depicted in words.

Had a bomb of dynamite been hurled into their midst, to repeat a former attempt at description, their surprise could not have been greater, though the result would no doubt have been far more fatal.

Boniface Dillingsworth was for the moment paralyzed, and his devilish control over Charlotte ceased.

Instantly Charlotte sprung away from Thorne Oldwood's side with a scream of almost terror; Mr. Goldsmith fell back in his chair as helpless as Boniface, yet withal with an expression of triumph; the minister stood aghast, and Thorne Oldwood was a picture of mingled surprise, disappointment, and rage.

It was a striking tableau.

And over them all, triumphant, stood Mrs. Clementine, with Charlotte now clinging to her as though for protection.

The minister was the first to speak.

"What is the meaning of this strange deception?" he inquired. "Why have I been called here to marry a couple, one of whom is already wedded?"

It was to Mr. Goldsmith that he spoke.

"I was not aware that my daughter was married," Mr. Goldsmith answered, in as firm a tone as he could command.

"Not aware of it, sir?"

"No, sir."

"How is it, then, that she presented herself to be married again? Surely it cannot be said that she was not aware of it, if she is married. Let me see that certificate, if you please, madam."

Mrs. Clementine handed it to him.

"It is genuine," the minister declared. "I know this reverend gentleman well, and this is his signature. I shall have nothing further to do with the matter whatever."

Boniface found his tongue.

"There must be some mistake," he remarked. "It cannot be otherwise. It will be well to hear from the young lady herself."

"No doubt she can throw some light upon it," said Mrs. Clementine in a very insinuating tone, as she turned her eyes full upon the fat-chinned rascal.

Boniface met them with his own snake-like eyes, and tried to exert his mesmeric power over her.

"Is it not a little strange," he questioned, "that the certificate should be in your possession instead of that of its rightful owner?"

Mrs. Clementine felt his horrible influence stealing over her, and with an effort she turned her eyes away and broke the spell.

"Whatever explanation I and Charlotte have to make," she said, firmly, "is due to Mr. Goldsmith and to him only. You can have no interest in the matter, surely, and I deny your right to question me. Pray excuse us."

As she uttered the last words she turned to the door, leading Charlotte with her, and with a bow to Mr. Goldsmith, went out.

"This is simply incomprehensible," the minister remarked, as the door closed after them.

"It is the strangest affair of the kind that ever came under my notice. Pray excuse me, gentlemen; it seems that I can be of no service here so I will take my leave."

"Wait, sir," Thorne Oldwood hastily requested; "allow me to pay you for your time. It—"

"No, no," the minister firmly refused. "I will accept nothing. I will accept nothing, sir. Allow me to bid you all good-morning."

"I hope, sir," observed Mr. Goldsmith, "that you will believe me when I say that whatever

the mystery of this secret marriage is, we knew nothing whatever about it, and know no more now than you do."

"I am willing to believe you, sir. I do believe you. But, the affair is incomprehensible, nevertheless."

Shaking his head, the minister left the room and the house.

No sooner had he gone than Boniface turned to Thorne Oldwood.

"We will excuse you," he said, peremptorily.

Thorne grew red with anger in an instant.

This was more than he could tamely stand.

"By what right do you take it upon yourself to dismiss me from this room?" he demanded, sharply. "Has Mr. Goldsmith ceased to be master in his own house?"

Boniface saw that he had made a serious mistake, and hastened to do his best to rectify it.

"My dear boy," he said humbly, while he felt more like striking the young man a blow with his fist, "pardon me. I was hasty. The excitement of the moment caused me to forget where I am."

"I accept your excuse, sir," Oldwood responded. "So used to commanding, in your position as the Head of our worthy Order, it is quite easy to understand the unintentional indignity you just put upon me. Since, however, you desire me to go, I will ask Mr. Goldsmith to excuse me and retire."

Boniface bit his lips; but he had to submit and swallow the pill, bitter as it was.

"You need not hurry yourself," said Mr. Goldsmith; "I am sure that Mr. Dillingsworth and I have nothing to say that you should not hear."

Another shock for the wily Boniface. Was this spoken in defiance?

"Thank you, sir," responded Thorne, "but as I have no excuse for staying longer, I will take my leave. I cannot express how seriously—how keenly—I feel my disappointment, sir; but, believe me, I hold you blameless."

Boniface was purple with rage. These words took the best weapon he held right out of his hands. Was this, too, spoken in a spirit of defiance, or more properly—revenge?

He, Boniface, had led Mr. Goldsmith to believe that it was Thorne Oldwood who held his secret, and who would publish it to the world.

Now Thorne himself had declared, openly, that he held Mr. Goldsmith blameless.

What did it mean?

Whatever it did mean, Mr. Goldsmith breathed a sigh of relief.

Thorne Oldwood left the room, and then the two men faced each other.

"Well, friend Boniface," Mr. Goldsmith exclaimed, "why do you not congratulate me?"

"Congratulate you?"

"Yes."

"Why should I?"

"What a man you are! Have I not just escaped the danger which you assured me was most imminent?"

"Oh! pardon me. I was thinking of your daughter. I see nothing in her conduct to congratulate you upon. Why this secret marriage? It looks—I say it looks, mind you—to me as though you may have had a hand in it. I do not say you had, but—"

"Then my word goes for nothing!" Mr. Goldsmith cried. "For forty years, Boniface Dillingsworth, the word of Burton Goldsmith has been considered as good as his bond."

"Pardon me, pardon me, I said it looks that way. I—"

"You had no right to say anything of the kind."

"Well, I recall the words."

"That does not heal the wound, however. But, no matter; let it pass."

"Then you think I can congratulate you, do you?"

"I see no reason why you should not, certainly. Thorne has as good as said I have nothing to fear from him."

"But does he mean it?"

"Why should he not? I had no knowledge of the fact that Charlotte had already married your nephew, and I was powerless."

"Well, I hope Thorne will keep his word. We cannot be certain, however, how long he will hold you blameless. He may let out your secret within the next hour."

"If so, I cannot help it. He and you are, I believe the only persons who know that story of my past. You are to be trusted, certainly; and I rely upon you to use your best influence with Thorne, in case of necessity, to let the past remain buried."

"Oh! you may trust me fully for that!" Boniface exclaimed, while in his heart he cursed the man before him. "I cannot, however, be responsible for what the young man may do."

"Of course not."

"The young man has met with a heavy disappointment, for he loved your daughter dearly, and there is no telling what he will do. I hope, however, for your sake, that the secret may remain buried."

"I certainly hope so, even though, as God is my witness, I am innocent. When I married Charlotte's mother, I had every reason to be—"

lieve that my first wife was dead. I— But, you know the story."

"Yes, and I will do all I can to protect you."

Some further conversation passed, the arch rascal doing his best to mend the breach his words had made in their confidence and friendship, and when he, Boniface, took his leave, he believed he had restored himself into Mr. Goldsmith's confidence.

When Boniface had gone, Mr. Goldsmith threw himself back in his chair with a smile.

"Does he think me blind?" he mused. "If he does he is mistaken. Now I begin to understand him. He is the one who threatened me, and from him I must look for the exposure, if it is to be made."

"My life upon it, Thorne Oldwood does not know anything about the affair at all. But, why is Boniface so interested in my family affairs? He seems to have control over Thorne Oldwood, and— Can it be that it is my wealth they are after? This is a serious charge to hold against a man in Boniface Dillingsworth's position, a man who has had my friendship and confidence for years; but I cannot help seeing what is put so plainly before me."

"More than ever do I think of poor Edmund, his peculiar spells, and his mysterious disappearance. He always lived an open, honored life, while Boniface has a past record not to be proud of. He sprung from one extreme to the other at once."

The entrance of Charlotte interrupted his reflections.

He put out his hand, and greeted her with a smile.

She was pale and nervous, but her father's once-more kindly smile gave her confidence, and taking his hand in hers, she sunk down on a stool beside him, and poured out the story of her hasty marriage.

"I forgive you and I bless you," the fond father said, when she had told him all. And then he, in turn, told his secret. He had married at the age of twenty, and one year later his wife, in whose family insanity could be traced, became raving mad, and had to be confined in an asylum. A year later, while he was in Europe, he received the tidings that she was dead. Four years afterward he married again, and now, at this late day, came Boniface Dillingsworth with the astounding declaration that his first wife was still living.

"I do not believe it!" Charlotte cried. "It is false! Boniface Dillingsworth is a rascal, and a man to be feared."

"Careful, careful my child."

"I know what I am saying, father. It must seem strange to you that I, in my right mind, knowing myself to be the wife of Clarence Dillingsworth, should come here as I did and give my hand in marriage to another, does it not?"

"Heavens! yes. I meant to ask you about that."

"I came to this room, when you called me, to defy you all. I came to tell you that I was already the wife of another. When I entered the door my eyes met those of Boniface Dillingsworth, and, by some power which must be born of the very demon of darkness, he controlled me. I knew what I desired to say, but I was powerless to say it, and I spoke the words which he put into my mouth."

Mr. Goldsmith could hardly believe that he heard aright. For some moments he sat silent in thought, and then he exclaimed:

"Now I can see it all! Order the carriage for me, Charlotte; I am going out."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AT THE DETECTIVE'S OFFICE.

CLARENCE DILLINGSWORTH went straight to the office of Nathan Gilbert.

Entering, he found a tall man in black in charge, and took him to be the person he desired to see.

"Are you Mr. Gilbert?" he asked.

"No, sir," was the reply, as the tall man left the window where he had been standing, offered a chair to Clarence, and seated himself at the desk, "but I am in charge. Mr. Gilbert is absent."

"Absent?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

The time was given, and it was, to a day, the same length as that of Mr. Dillingsworth's absence.

"Where is he?" Clarence asked.

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"Is he missing?"

"He has not been seen in this office since the—th."

"It is very strange."

"May I inquire who you are?"

"I am Clarence Dillingsworth."

Detective Johns was all interest at once.

"I have heard of you," he said. "You are a nephew of Mr. Edmund Dillingsworth, the missing man, I believe."

"Yes, sir; and he was last seen on the day on which you say Mr. Gilbert disappeared."

Mr. Johns had only said that Gilbert had not been seen in his office since a certain day.

"That is a mere coincidence. Mr. Gilbert's

business may account for his absence. We do not consider him as lost."

"Did I understand you to say that you do not know where he is?"

"I do not."

"But you know how to reach him, in case of necessity?"

"I would endeavor to do so."

"And if you failed?"

"Then I would search for him."

"Then I think you had better begin your search at once."

"Why?"

"For these reasons: I have just learned that Mr. Gilbert was in my uncle's employ, and the fact that both disappeared at the same time leads me to believe that both have met the same fate—have perhaps been murdered."

"How do you know that Mr. Gilbert was in Mr. Dillingsworth's employ?"

Clarence handed him the receipt.

"Is not that sufficient proof?" he demanded.

"How came this into your possession?" Johns asked.

"I found it in my uncle's safe."

"Have you shown it to any one?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"To my Uncle Boniface, Edmund's brother."

"What does he think?"

"He thinks that the fact of Edmund's having a detective in his employ, indicates that he had enemies, and he fears that both Edmund and the detective have met with foul play."

"It certainly looks so, and I shall begin a search for Mr. Gilbert directly."

"Were you not aware that he was engaged in my uncle's service?"

"Why should I be? I am merely an employee here. I am in charge, though, in the absence of our chief, and anything that I can do for you in our line of business I shall be glad to undertake."

"Then I want you to undertake to find Nathan Gilbert and my uncle. Put your whole force at work, and do not stop at any expense."

"I intend to begin a search for Gilbert immediately. Whatever I learn you shall hear. By the way, have you any clew? Do you know whether the detective was with your uncle or not on the night when he disappeared?"

"I believe he was. Since finding this receipt, I believe that a valet he had just engaged was the detective in disguise."

"And the valet is missing?"

"He is."

"This looks very serious. I shall do all in my power to clear the mystery up."

"It is proof that the detective and the valet were one and the same person."

"So I consider it. By the way, have the police found any clew?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"All the worse. The police force is not to be despised in a case of this kind. Those fellows have sharp noses."

"Well, I will go. Please let me know what you learn."

"I will do so."

Clarence took his leave then, having done all he could do in the matter.

A short time later another person entered the detective's office.

This time it was Burton Goldsmith.

"Where is Gilbert?" he demanded. "I want to see him on important business."

"He is missing," was the ready reply he received.

And then followed a conversation in some respects similar to the one recorded above.

"You say Clarence has just been here?" Mr. Goldsmith questioned.

"Yes."

"And that he engaged, or urged you, at least, to make every effort to find Gilbert?"

"Yes; and of course we shall do so."

"Well, sir, I believe that I hold the key to the whole mystery."

"You?"

"Yes."

"But, you knew nothing about it until I explained it to you just now."

"Did I not?—do not be too sure of it. True, I did not know that Edmund had engaged a detective, and that that detective was Gilbert; but I have discovered something, and I came here to engage Gilbert to work it up."

"And you think you hold the key to the whole affair?"

"I do."

"Why, then, did you not go to the police?"

"Because they would hardly credit the story I have to tell. I am not sure that you will either; but I want to put the clew into your hands, since Gilbert is absent. It may, and no doubt will, lead you to find him."

"Well, let me hear your story."

Mr. Goldsmith told his story in full. He recounted every event he could recall, from the time of Edmund Dillingsworth's first indications of insanity, down to the startling revelation his daughter Charlotte had just made. And then he voiced his suspicions against Boniface boldly, though enjoining the detective to keep his name out of the affair.

"I believe, sir, that you have hit the right

string," the detective declared. "We will investigate the matter, and I promise that your name shall not be mentioned."

"You see, sir, if my suspicions are well founded, I have reasons to fear that man."

"You have indeed."

Just then the door opened, and who should walk in but Boniface Dillingsworth himself."

At sight of Mr. Goldsmith his face paled for a second, but he crossed the floor promptly and offered his hand.

"It is quite a surprise to find you here," he declared.

"And so it to find you here, too," Mr. Goldsmith responded, as he gave his hand.

"Any harm done if I inquire what it is brings you to such an office?"

"Not the least. I came to see Mr. Gilbert, but I find that he is missing. I have made up my mind to have the mystery of my first wife's reported death fully investigated."

Boniface looked relieved.

"I thought of suggesting that very thing to you once," he remarked, "but I thought perhaps you preferred not to meddle with it. I think you have taken a wise step. If you can obtain proof that she died when it was reported to you that she did, you can defy any one."

Detective Johns, who recognized Boniface the moment he opened the door, had expected to witness a thrilling scene.

It all rested with Mr. Goldsmith.

And now when he, the detective, saw how ably suspicion had been turned aside, he felt a profound admiration for Mr. Goldsmith.

He took the cue, and hastened to the old gentleman's assistance.

"And I think we can easily settle the question beyond all doubt," he remarked.

Mr. Goldsmith was more than pleased to see how readily the detective took the idea up and carried it along.

"And now," he, Mr. Goldsmith asked, "let me inquire why you are here, if you care to tell."

"I am perfectly willing to tell," was the ready response. "I can inform you as well, and better, however, by allowing you to hear what I have to say to the detective. First, though, you go ahead and close your own business."

Mr. Goldsmith was for a second a little puzzled what to say or do, and the detective was decidedly uneasy, but the old gentleman quickly rallied and proved himself equal to the emergency.

"I was about to recount the history of the case in full," he said, "and if you are in any hurry—"

"No, no, I am not," Boniface assured, "so go ahead, unless you do not care to have me hear; and in that case—"

The detective was more uneasy than ever.

"You are perfectly welcome to hear, since it is no secret to you," Mr. Goldsmith interrupted, and forthwith he began his story.

He laid the matter before the detective exactly as it stood, having already done so in telling his story before Boniface came in. But this time he made no mention of anything else. He merely wanted to know the truth regarding the report of his first wife's death, of which he had never had any doubt until Boniface declared that she was still alive.

The detective listened attentively, asked some questions, made notes of dates, etc., and Boniface Dillingsworth could not doubt the genuineness of the whole affair.

Back of it all was Gilbert of Gotham. It was in his interest that Johns was working, and in the interest of the Dillingsworth case.

"Is that all I can tell that will help you?" Mr. Goldsmith asked finally.

"That seems to be all that is necessary in the matter," the detective replied.

And so the farce ended.

It proved afterward, however, that it was to be no farce, but a genuine engagement, for Mr. Goldsmith so informed the detective by letter, later on.

"Now," Mr. Goldsmith remarked to Boniface, "I will give way to you."

"My business can soon be stated," the arch-villain said. "In the first place, I want to inquire whether my nephew, Clarence Dillingsworth, has been here this morning."

"He has, sir," the detective informed.

"And had with him a receipt given by Nathan Gilbert to my poor brother, Edmund?"

"He had."

"Then you will understand the object of my coming here. I want to learn where Nathan Gilbert is."

"He is missing, sir," was the reply, "and has been since the—th."

"Then it was he who was my brother's valet?"

The conversation ran on then in the same vein as it had been between the detective and Clarence.

Boniface, too, urged the detective to put forth every effort to find the missing men, and begged to be kept posted in regard to anything he might learn.

All this the detective readily promised.

Secretly, Boniface was well pleased. The de

tective could have no object in keeping anything from him, the brother and friend of the missing man, and beyond doubt Nathan Gilbert was dead.

So he decided.

Their business done, the two men were about to leave the office when Jonathan Jaybird's man, The Mouse, entered with a letter.

CHAPTER XXX.

BORING FOR OIL.

"SKUSE me, gents," said The Mouse, as he doffed his hat and made his bow, "but I'd like ter see Gilbert o' Gotham, if he's in."

"Which he isn't," said Johns. "What do you want?"

"I've got a letter here for him."

"Well, this is his office, and I guess it will not be necessary for you to see him in order to leave the letter."

"I dunno but it will," The Mouse returned, as he held back the letter. "This here letter is one I found under most peccolier circumstances, an' I reckon I'd orter have a fiver fer bringin' it right here in good order."

"Fiver your grandmother!" exclaimed the detective. "If that letter is addressed to Nathan Gilbert, give it to me at once!"

"No yer don't!" The Mouse cried, and he turned to leave the office.

Detective Johns reached under the desk at which he was seated, pulled a little ring that was there ready at hand, and with a sharp click the door was locked.

"No you don't," he remarked calmly, as The Mouse tried in vain to get out of the room.

Mr. Goldsmith and Father Boniface were both astonished and amused.

"Now," Johns remarked, in a tone of decision, "let me see that letter."

"I reckon I'll have ter, seein' as ye've got me inter a trap," was The Mouse's crestfallen answer, and he advanced to the desk and put the letter into the detective's hand.

"Now," said Johns, "you sit down over there for a few minutes," pointing at a chair at the opposite end of the room.

"But, I must go," The Mouse protested. "I've got a 'portant 'gagement, mister, an' I'll have ter—"

"You have an important engagement right here, sir," the detective interrupted, "and you will have to do as I tell you, for the present. Now, sit down."

The Mouse obeyed.

The detective's quick eye had noted many peculiar things about the letter. It was dirty, had been folded tightly, and there were marks of a string upon it indicating that it had been securely tied to some object.

He meant to know how it had come into the possession of such a fellow as The Mouse.

Boniface was eying the envelope curiously, but he was not close enough to recognize the writing.

In fact, the detective gave him but little opportunity to do so, for he put the envelope down on the desk and placed a weight upon it, remarking:

"Pardon this interruption, gentlemen, but you see how we have to deal with such fellows."

"You manage them admirably well, I observe," Boniface remarked.

"We have to handle them without gloves," the detective explained. "This gentleman has made our acquaintance before, and ought to have known better than to try such a poor trick."

"He will know better next time, no doubt," observed Mr. Goldsmith. And he added:

"Well, Boniface, let us be going. I have my carriage here, and I suppose you will ride up with me?" in a questioning tone.

"Yes, certainly; but, one moment first," and turning to the detective he remarked:

"I suppose it is hardly possible that this letter you have just received in such a peculiar way can have anything to do with the mystery—"

"It is hardly possible," the detective interrupted. "Whatever I learn, though, you shall know."

"That is all; a mere idea, you see. Well, Burton, I am ready."

Johns unfastened the door, in the same manner in which he had locked it, and the two men departed.

"Now," said Johns, turning to The Mouse as he took up the letter and opened it, "I will attend to your case."

"Say," The Mouse inquired, "who was that 'ere bloke?—th' big one with th' fat chin."

"Why do you ask?" the detective demanded.

"'Cause he's a crooked one, whoever he is."

"Oh! that won't do!" Johns exclaimed. "I guess you must be mistaken in your man."

"Not a bit I ain't," The Mouse insisted.

"You must be."

"I say I ain't. I've got eyes an' ears, I reckon."

"Well, what do you know about him? since you are so positive."

"What'll ye give fer th' information?"

"Nothing, for you are mistaken. Hold your tongue, now, till I read this letter."

"Guess I know what I'm talkin' erbout," The Mouse muttered, as he lapsed into silence.

Detective Johns had taken the sheet from its envelope while talking, and he now opened and read it.

It read as follows, beginning abruptly without address or date:

"DEAR SIR:—

"I am imprisoned, but I do not know where, nor do I know the present day and date. I am informed that I am in an asylum, and that I have been here many weeks. The only clew I can give you toward finding me, is this: Opposite to my prison, on the corner, is a large building bearing the sign—'Enzangams, Rembrics & Co.' I cannot understand why you do not rescue me, unless some misfortune has befallen you, or you are unable to find where I am. I am not without hopes, however, for I have just received the inclosed note from my brother Boniface. Pray hasten to my rescue, if this reach you."

"EDMUND DILLINGSWORTH."

The note inclosed read:

"DEAR EDMUND:—

"I have, after patient search, just discovered where you are. Be hopeful, and I will rescue you. Have succeeded in bribing your jailer, and I think we can trust him."

BONIFACE."

Detective Johns was surprised and delighted beyond measure.

His face, however, showed no signs of his thoughts and emotions.

Here was something that would place Gilbert of Gotham at once master of the whole situation.

One sentence—"I am not without hopes"—puzzled him for a moment, but he soon understood why the unfortunate man had written in that way. If his letter chanced to fall into his brother's hands, he did not want him to learn that he was suspected.

Johns had guessed correctly.

"Where did you find this?" he asked, turning to The Mouse.

"It was fastened to th' neck of a little dog that I picked up on th' street," was the truthful answer.

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Hope m' die 'fain't," The Mouse declared earnestly.

"And where did you find the dog?"

The Mouse explained, and the detective made a note of it.

"Did you open the letter?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I am inclined to give you something for your trouble, Mouse, and also a little advice. Here is a dollar. And now bear this in mind: If you ever have occasion to come to this office again, do not act as you did on this occasion."

"What yer mean?" The Mouse asked, as he pocketed the money.

"I mean this: Do not come in with the idea that you can bully us, and do not state your business in so blatant a manner."

"Kerrect."

The Mouse was about to take his leave, and had, in fact, opened the door, when Johns called him back.

"Say, Mouse," he said to him, "do you think there is any 'detective' in you?"

This hit The Mouse in his tenderest spot. He flattered himself that he was a detective. For proof of his ability he could refer to Jonathan Jaybird, for whom he had done any amount of dirty work.

"I think there is," he answered stoutly.

"Where can you be found? in case we should ever need a fellow of your cut?"

The Mouse gave his address readily enough, which was all the detective cared for.

"Very well," Johns said, "I will put it down. You need not live in expectations, you know, for we may never want you; but, if we should have occasion to use you, we will know where to find you."

The Mouse's words regarding Boniface Dillingsworth, had proved that he knew something about that worthy man, and the detective wanted to make sure of knowing where to find him in case Gilbert should want him.

"I haven't a great deal of faith in your ability, though," Johns added, as The Mouse was about leaving, but I may be able to find use for you."

"Why ain't yer got much faith, boss?"

"Because you seem liable to make great mistakes."

"How d'ye know?"

"I judge from the assertion you made a few minutes ago about one of the men who were here when you came in."

"You don't believe that, eh?"

"Decidedly not. Can you prove what you assert?"

"Well, no, I don't know as I kin—"

"I guess not."

"I jest tell ye, though, it's th' dead sure fact; that big feller in black is a crook."

"You are mistaken. What do you know about him? Do you know him?"

"No; else why should I ax you who he was? But I've got dead roots onter his haze, sure as shootin'. Didn't I see him down on th' Bowery one night a-talkin' ter Ben Hickens? an' didn't I hear what they was a-sayin'? I reckon I did. You detectives don't know everything, not by a big sight."

"Who is Ben Hickens?" asked Johns.

"Ben Hickens? Why, he's a out-an'-out crook."

"And do you mean to tell me that the gentleman who just left this room was talking with him?"

"Sure pop."

"I don't believe it—that is, I can't believe it; I am sure you must be mistaken."

"All right, have it yer own way if ye want ter, but I know."

"What were they talking about?"

"No use me a-tellin' ye if ye ain't goin' ter believe me."

Oh! well, do as you please about it," and the detective turned to his desk.

"If there was anything in it, yer know; ef it was worth a fiver to ye," The Mouse hinted; "I dunno but—"

"It isn't, it isn't worth a cent."

"Then I—"

"Say, though," Johns added, as he looked around, "since you think you are cut out for a detective, I am willing to listen to your story, for it is hardly fair to form my opinion without hearing what you have to say; so, if you want to tell it, do so; otherwise, go. Understand, though, that I do not believe for a moment that the gentleman who was here was the one you saw. You are mistaken in that."

"I ain't mistaken, I— But, I'll give it to ye straight, jest as it is."

"Very well."

"Ye see this here Ben Hickens is a night-watchman in a big storage-house away up-town. That's what's he's paid fer, at least, but he let's th' buildin' watch itself most th' time, I guess. One night I was on th' Bowery, an' I see this feller—th' one that was here—an' Ben a-talkin'. I smoke up unseen an' took in what I could catch. Th' fat-chin feller, he was a-tellin' Ben he had a patient fer him, an' wanted him ter come an' take keer of him. Seems it was a old man that was shut up fer a loonytick, an' Ben was ter tend to him an' see that he didn't git out. 'I'll see that you don't lose nothin' when th' old man croaks,' said th' fat-chin feller, an' Ben 'greed ter take th' job. That's all."

"You did well!" the detective exclaimed. "I shall not fail to speak of you to Mr. Gilbert as soon as he comes home."

"Then ye believe I ain't mistaken?"

"Oh! no, I can't give you credit for that! You may go now."

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHARLOTTE CONFESSES.

DETECTIVE JOHNS was highly gratified at the sudden favorable turn events had taken.

He was anxious now to see Gilbert of Gotham and put the clews into his hand.

The door opened and an old man entered.

Johns evidently knew him well, for he sprang up with the exclamation:

"By heavens, I am glad to see you!"

It was Gilbert of Gotham in disguise.

They shook hands, and Gilbert asked:

"Well, what did they want here?"

"Ah! you've had your eye on them."

"I should say so. Boniface seems to be a little troubled to-day. Ha called at the Dillingsworth home, then went to see Goldsmith, and from there here. I think the pot is beginning to boil."

"I should say it was!" exclaimed the under detective. "Just read this."

He handed Gilbert the letter, together with the note it contained.

The Steel Arm Detective read both, and then said:

"Now I have the game in my own hands, and will soon bring it to an end if nothing happens. It was The Mouse who brought this?"

"Yes, and that is not all."

"What else?"

Briefly but fully, then, Johns recounted all that he had learned, and told all that had been said.

Gilbert, in turn, gave him his side of the case—that is, what he had been able to learn concerning it.

This was his first visit to his office since his mishap.

When they had exchanged notes, Gilbert remarked:

"Now comes the tug-of-war. To-night I shall try to get Edmund Dillingsworth out of his prison."

"Do you know where the place is? That is, do you know where the building is that bears the strange sign he names?"

"I do."

"No doubt we could easily find it in the Directory."

"Undoubtedly, but I happen to know right where it is. I was looking at it yesterday, and again this morning. It is right opposite the end of a large storage building, and the storage building is on the same block that is occupied by Boniface Dillingsworth and his gang."

"This is getting pretty close to that wily old rat, then."

"It is indeed, and we will get a little closer still."

Other points were discussed and other busi-

ness was attended to, and then the detective chief took his departure.

In the afternoon there came another person to the detective's office.

This time it was Mrs. Clementine.

"Where is Mr. Gilbert?" she asked. "I have just come from your house, Mr. Johns, and he was not there."

"I do not know where he is just at present," Johns answered. "He was here this forenoon."

"Indeed! Then that was his first visit since his unfortunate brush with the enemy, was it not?"

"It was. He has used every precaution not to let it become known that he is around."

"Then you cannot tell me just where and when I would be likely to find him, I suppose?"

"No, I cannot. He came here in disguise as an old man, and as he has now proof enough to guide him he will make his first move to-night. I shall not know much about his movements until I hear from him again. I might be able to find him, though, if really a case of great importance or necessity."

"Well, I have news for him, but since you say he already has new proof to guide him, I do not really know whether the information I can give him is of much importance or little."

"Which case does it concern?"

"The Dillingsworth case, chiefly; though I have some new information regarding the missing diamonds, too."

"Well, since I am in charge of the office, Mrs.—"

"Clementine," the lady corrected before a mistake could be made.

Detective Johns bowed and smiled.

"You are quick," he said, "and quite right. The mistake was nearly made."

"As I saw. But, what were you about to say?"

"I was about to say this: As I am in charge, and know the case pretty thoroughly, let me hear your story and I will know what there is new in it; that is, new since Mr. Gilbert's latest information and clues."

"I will do so."

Mrs. Clementine, then, told of what had taken place that morning at the Goldsmith residence.

"It is good evidence, certainly," Johns agreed—or rather decided, "but Gilbert has better clues for his present needs. This will fit in splendidly at the closing."

"You say he intends to make a decisive move to-night?"

"Yes; he has learned where Mr. Dillingsworth is, and will attempt to rescue him."

"I am glad to hear that, and I hope he will succeed."

"And so do I. But, you said you have new information concerning the lost diamonds, too?"

"Yes."

"What is that?"

"I have got proof now for all that I suspected; I have seen the two persons together and have heard part of a conversation they had; I know where the diamonds, or some of them at least, were pawned; and I am ready to have the parties arrested."

"Good! splendid!" Johns exclaimed. "I felt sure you were right. But, we must make no arrests now. All must be held back until Gilbert of Gotham gives the word."

"Well, of course I must content myself, then, but it is a very unpleasant position for me to be placed in. Miss Goldsmith must certainly be getting tired of my doing nothing, as it must look to her, and—"

"Why can you not take her into your confidence, then, and—"

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"Do you not see? She could not keep quiet, and our birds would take alarm."

"True enough, true enough."

"I believe I will, though, tell her that I have the proof, but that the chain is not complete. That will be better than having nothing to report."

"Yes, decidedly."

"I thank you for the idea—"

"I do not claim it at all."

"Well, no matter. And now I will go back. I questioned whether I ought to come here or not, fearing that I might be followed, but I decided to risk it."

"You are safe, this time, I think, and the work will now soon be done. By the way, I think I will put another man on the case, one to keep an eye upon the diamond thief."

"A good idea."

Mrs. Clementine left the office, then, and returned to Mr. Goldsmith's.

Entering Charlotte's sitting-room unannounced, as she had been in the habit of doing, she was surprised to find Mr. Goldsmith there, he sitting in Charlotte's favorite chair and she upon her knees before him.

"Pardon me," the lady detective said, and she drew back at once.

"Is that you, Mrs. Clementine?" Charlotte inquired.

"Yes."

"Come in, then, please."

The lady detective obeyed, and Charlotte rose from her kneeling position and took a seat on a stool.

"I have just confessed to papa the loss of my diamonds," the young lady announced, "and have told him who you are."

Mrs. Clementine nodded.

"And I have pardoned her little sin in keeping it a secret and deceiving me in the matter," Mr. Goldsmith added. "She had no reason to be afraid to tell me."

"None whatever," Mrs. Clementine ventured to agree.

"And now that the secret is out, Mrs. Clementine," the old gentleman added, "may I inquire what you think of the affair?"

"It was rather a mystery at first, sir," was the reply, "but now that I see it plainly and know who the guilty parties are, it is quite easily explained."

"What! you know who the guilty ones are?"

"Not so loudly, sir," the lady detective cautioned. And then she answered:

"Yes, I know who they are."

"Name them."

"I cannot do so yet."

"Cannot do so?"

"No, sir."

"And why not?"

"Because Mr. Gilbert is not ready to make the arrests. You see, sir, we hope to recover the diamonds."

"That is no excuse for not telling us, however."

"Pardon me, but I must not do so. I assure you, though, that you shall know ere long."

"Before long will not do," Mr. Goldsmith exclaimed. "I want to know now."

"You will have to wait, sir."

"But I have a right to know," the old gentleman insisted.

"I do not deny that, sir, but I must remain firm."

"You admit my right to know—then at least you should give me a good reason for not telling me."

"Have I not done so?"

"You say Mr. Gilbert wants to make sure of the diamonds before he arrests the guilty parties, or something of the kind. Very good. But does he imagine that we would let the secret out?"

"If I do not reveal the secret it cannot become known, and I shall not reveal it. And, too, I must request you both to keep the loss a secret. Everything depends on this."

"Well, if you will not let us know the truth," Mr. Goldsmith observed, in a more moderate tone, "of course we must wait. I know Nathan Gilbert well enough to trust him."

"I am glad to hear you say so, papa," remarked Charlotte, "for I am sure we can trust Mrs. Clementine, too."

"I only regret that you did not inform me of the loss at once," the old gentleman remarked as he rose to leave the room, "but that cannot be helped now, and as I have forgiven you I will say no more about it. I will keep the loss a secret, Mrs. Clementine, as you request."

With these words Mr. Goldsmith left the room.

Then Charlotte turned to the detective to hear the assurance from her lips again that the guilty ones were really discovered.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE RESCUE.

NIGHT.

The Bowery ablaze with lights and the sidewalks thronged with people.

Coming down that great thoroughfare, near Grand street, with a cigar in his mouth and his hat adjusted sidewise like a yacht in a stiff breeze, is our friend, The Mouse.

At the corner of Grand street stands a man who is watching all who pass, as though waiting for some one.

He is a tall, well-shaped man, and his keen eyes are as bright as polished steel. He is clad in a suit of coarse material, wears a slouch hat, and his general appearance is that of a rough-and-ready workman.

Presently he sees The Mouse.

That this is the person he has been awaiting is clearly evident, for his face lights up and he steps forward to meet him.

Need it be explained that this man was Gilbert of Gotham?

When The Mouse came up the detective stopped him and asked:

"Say, friend, do you live 'round this part o' th' city?"

"What if I do?" demanded The Mouse.

"Oh! ye needn't be so snappy about it," the detective exclaimed; "I kin ask somebody else what I want ter know. You seemed ter be a sharp-lookin' feller, though, an' that's why I stopped ye. Good-night."

The detective turned away then, but he had gone barely a step when The Mouse stopped him.

"Say, skuse me," he apologized, "but I thought mebby you was tryin' ter give me a blind steer. What is it ye want?"

"No, I'm on th' square," Gilbert declared, "and I want ter get a little p'int o' information."

"Well, what is it ye want?" The Mouse asked. "If I kin help ye out I'll do it. I don't mind tellin' ye," he whispered in a confidential tone, "that I'm a detective."

"Sho!" exclaimed Gilbert, "you don't say!"

"Fact, sure."

"I knowed you was a sharp one th' minute I sot eyes on ye. I reckon you must know th' hull city, e'ena'most, don't ye?"

"I reckon I do," the flattered Mouse boasted.

"Then you're jest th' feller I want ter git hold on. Ye see I'm lookin' fer a feller by name o' Ben Hickens, an' I was told this was th' most likely place fer ter find him. D'ye know him?"

"Reckon I do, mister."

"Bully! an' I'm glad you happened along. Kin ye tell me where he hangs up?"

"I know right where he is, fer I seen him not ten minutes ago. Come erlong an' I'll p'int him out to ye."

"Good! you're a hull team, you be."

The Mouse turned and conducted the stranger up the Bowery for some distance, and finally entered a saloon.

"Now," said the detective, "jest p'int him out, if ye see him, an' I'll make it right with ye."

"That's him, th' feller a-settin' over there with his back to'rds us."

"Are you sure?"

"You bet! I tell ye us detectives don't make no mistakes."

"All right, and much 'bliged to ye. Here's a half-dollar ter treat yerself with. Glad I met ye. Good-night."

Gilbert left his guide abruptly, then, and crossed over to where Ben Hickens was seated.

"Now there's somethin' in this," The Mouse reflected, "an' I'm goin' ter spot th' game an' learn what it is. I—"

He was touched on the shoulder at that moment, and looking around found himself face to face with Detective Johns.

"I have been looking for you, Mouse," the detective said. "I think I can use you."

The reader will see at once how it was. Gilbert of Gotham had had Johns on hand to follow him and call The Mouse away as soon as he was done with him.

"I was jest doin' a little shadowin' on my own account," The Mouse boasted; and then he explained the situation.

"You're a sly one, and no mistake," Johns declared. "Since there's no object at stake, though," he added, "come with me and let me give you some real work to do." And he led the conceited young man away and put him to work on a case purely fictitious.

In the mean time Gilbert of Gotham had spoken to Ben Hickens.

Going up to where that worthy was seated, he laid his hand upon his shoulder and said:

"Ben, I want to see you."

The rascal looked up with a start and exclaimed:

"Who be you?"

"Don't you know me?"

"No, sir, I don't. What d'ye want?"

"Then you have forgotten me," the detective accounted. "I am one of General Boniface's men."

"And who th' hot place is General Boniface?" the man demanded.

"It is just possible that you do not know his name, so I'll make it clear to you. He is the large, fat-faced man, wearing black clothes, who engaged you to watch the store-house uptown, and who pays you extra for taking care of his prisoner. Do you know who I mean now?"

Ben Hickens was astounded.

How could any one have learned the secret?

"An' ye say he sent ye ter find me?" he queried.

"Yes."

"What fer?"

"He wants us to take the old man out of there and move him to another place."

"Th' fun he does! He didn't say nothin' ter me about it, an' it ain't more'n two hours ago sence I seen him."

"Yes, I know; but he changed his mind all at once. Come, let's go out of here, and we can talk it over."

"All right, I'm with ye."

The two left the saloon.

"Now," said the detective, when they reached the sidewalk, "if you're ready we'll be off. I have a carriage waiting down here a little way."

"But I ain't quite ready," Hickens declared. "I want some proof o' your word afore I go ter work."

"Well, here it is. Can you read?"

"Yes."

"Would you know the boss's writing?"

"Yes, I reckon."

The detective handed him this:

"BEN:—"

"It is all right."

"BONIFACE."

The detective had been easily able to prepare

such a bait, copying the handwriting of the note that had been inclosed in the found letter.

"That is all right, isn't it?" the detective inquired.

"Yes, that's his writin', sure; and that settles it. I'm with ye."

"Come on, then, and we'll go up in the carriage. I'll give you the rest of the points as we go along."

A short distance down the street a carriage was found waiting, and as soon as the detective had directed the driver where to drive to, the pair got in.

"Now," requested Hickens, when they started off, "jest give me th' hull thing in few words."

"All right, but there isn't much to tell. About all there is to it is this: We are to go into the building, explain to the prisoner that Boniface has sent us to take him out, and then take him away as quickly and as secretly as we can. I will show you where we are to take him to later on."

They talked on until the carriage finally reached their destination.

"You wait here," said the detective to the driver, when they alighted, and then they hurried away.

The carriage had stopped about one block away from the storage building, which the detective explained was necessary in order not to create any suspicion.

In a few minutes they were at the door of the building in which Edmund Dillingsworth was confined.

In the large door was a small one which was used by the watchman.

This Hickens opened at once, and they went in, closing the door behind them.

All was intense darkness.

"Stan' right where ye be, now," Hickens cautioned, "or ye'll break yer neck. I'll have a light in a minute."

The detective obeyed, but he held his hand on a revolver which was held for instant use in case of necessity.

Hickens meant no treachery, though, for a light was presently seen, and he came forward with a lantern in his hand.

"Now," he directed, "foller me."

He led the way to the northern end of the building, and the detective was quick to notice that the building was shorter within than without. There a door was opened and they descended a flight of stairs.

The stairs led down to a large cellar.

Advancing to the corner nearest the foot of the stairs, Hickens opened a small door that revealed a long passageway.

Into this they stepped, and then, right on the other side of the wall, they found another flight of stairs leading upward.

"This way," whispered the jailer, as he turned and started up them, and in a few moments they were at the door of Mr. Dillingsworth's prison-room.

Here Hickens requested his companion to hold the lantern.

The detective took it, and after a moment of delay the door was opened and they passed in.

"Who is there?" asked the prisoner, as he started up in bed, the sudden coming of the light having awakened him.

"Shh!" hissed the detective, "do not make a sound. We have come to rescue you. Get up and dress as quickly as you can."

"Who sent you?" was asked.

"Your brother Boniface," the detective replied. And he added:

"Come, do not delay a moment, or the watchmen of the asylum may discover us and block our way."

As he said this, Gilbert gave the jailer a sly poke to remind him to carry on the deception.

For the present it was the detective's purpose to deceive them both.

"That's th' idee, straight," Hickens declared. "Ye remember I told ye this mornin' that I had gone over ter your side, sir."

"Yes, yes," Mr. Dillingsworth responded, as he got out of bed, "and I will be ready in a minute. Any change will be welcome, no matter what."

In a few minutes the old gentleman was ready, and then silently they left the room and locked the door, and ere long were out of the building.

All doors had been properly locked behind them, and the watchman had put his lantern away in its proper place.

Going to where the carriage awaited them, they entered, and then were driven rapidly away.

In the mean time, on the way from the building to the carriage, the detective had found opportunity to whisper into Mr. Dillingsworth's ear:

"Do not mention my name; I am Nathan Gilbert."

When the carriage finally stopped it was before an unpretending house on one of the quiet streets.

This was the home of Detective Johns.

Gilbert of Gotham was the first to get out, then followed Mr. Dillingsworth, and last came Ben Hickens.

Barely had the latter's feet touched the ground when two men stepped forward, laid hands upon

him and snapped a pair of handcuffs onto his wrists.

"Ben Hickens," they exclaimed, "you are our prisoner." And while Gilbert conducted Mr. Dillingsworth into the house, his men led Hickens away a prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MADMAN OR DEMON?

ABOUT the time that Gilbert of Gotham and Mr. Dillingsworth entered the house, as shown, Boniface, Knight, and Thorn Oldwood were holding a council of war in Boniface's room.

"What!" Boniface exclaimed, after some startling declaration on the part of Knight, "can it be true?"

"It undoubtedly is true."

"True that Effie has married Julian Gladstone?"

"It is."

"But how do you know it?"

"I overheard Clarence and Julian in conversation not an hour ago. They were both married at the same time."

"By heavens! I cannot believe it!"

"There is no doubt about it, and my nose is put out of joint as well as Thorne's."

Boniface's rage knew no bounds. He raved and stormed like a madman.

"Leave me! leave my sight!" he finally commanded, "for I am likely to harm you if you remain. Do not leave the house, though, but hold yourselves ready to come if I call you."

The young men obeyed and left the room. They were evidently fully in his power.

Then Boniface began to pace up and down the floor, fairly foaming at the mouth. It seemed that his reason had left him—that he was a madman indeed.

"They defy me!" he grated, "they all defy me! but I will let them see who is their master. They shall die! Yes, I swear it! they all shall die, and by my hand. Then the fortune will be mine. Ha, ha, ha! then it will all be mine!"

So great was his blind, unreasoning, and wicked rage, that he seemed really insane.

To and fro, to and fro, he paced, like a caged tiger. His eyes were hot and bloodshot, and his breath came in quick gasps.

"After all these years, when I am at last ready to reap the reward of my labors, to be foiled thus. After watching the fortune grow, and counting the hours one by one, panting for the time to come for me to begin my play, they defy me. Ha, ha, ha! they are mad—mad! And they shall answer for their madness with their blood!"

With a cry he sprung to his table, flung open a drawer, and snatched up a long, glittering dagger.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed, madly, "how pretty this will look when it is red with blood! Ha, ha, ha! And his shall be the first to stain it. With my own hand I will kill him, and his body will be found in the river. Come! come, pretty one! and let me see your work!"

With devilish coolness, then, he lighted a small lamp, opened the secret door, and started forward to go to the room where his brother Edmund had been imprisoned.

Descending the stairs, he advanced along the passage until he came to the second flight. There he put his lamp down on the ground and went on without it.

On reaching the top of the stairs he advanced with the greatest caution to the room where Edmund was supposed to be.

He paused at the door and listened.

Not a sound could be heard, and silently he turned the key in the lock and as silently pushed open the door.

The little window admitted barely sufficient light to render the darkness penetrable, and the outlines of the bed could be discerned but very indistinctly.

With the stealth of a cat the would-be-murderer crept forward, his mind bent upon his intended crime and the dagger clutched tightly.

When he reached the bed he raised his arm, and thinking he saw his brother's hated form lying there, aimed a blow and struck with all his might.

With a *swish* the dagger was driven to the hilt—not into a human form, but into the mattress.

Boniface sprung back with a cry and prepared to defend himself. He had no thought but that his brother was there.

A minute of silence followed. What did it mean?

Recovering the dagger, he started to explore the room.

With the utmost caution he proceeded, for he thought that Edmund must be asleep on one of the chairs.

At last the truth forced itself upon him that his brother was not there.

Out he rushed, and to the place where he had left the lamp. Snatching it up he hastened back to the room, and then the truth was revealed.

Edmund Dillingsworth was not there.

The madman—or demon of darkness, whichever he was—could hardly believe it.

"Ben Hickens has played me false!" he cried.

"Edmund has bribed him to let him escape. Oh! but he shall answer for this! He shall be burned alive!"

Madly he rushed from the room, along the hall, and down the stairs.

He tried the door leading into the cellar. It was locked.

Then came the thought that perhaps Hickens had, for some reason, put the prisoner into one of the other rooms.

Up the stairs he rushed again, but the hope was not realized. The prisoner was indeed gone.

Boniface returned to his room.

"Curses! a thousand curses upon them!" he hissed, as he began to pace to and fro again. "They defy me, but I will teach them that I am their master. I—Ha! ha! ha! I forget the power I have. I will bring my dear brother back to me within an hour. I defy them to keep him, unless they put him in irons."

With these words the arch rascal flung himself down into a chair and began to concentrate his thoughts to bring Edmund under his mesmeric control.

At the same moment, while Gilbert of Gotham was conversing with Edmund about the case, the old gentleman was suddenly seized with one of his peculiar spells.

He began to tremble violently, his face assumed a vacant expression, and in a moment he sprang to his feet exclaiming:

"Show me the door—quick! quick! I must go! I cannot tarry a moment! Show me the door!" And he made a desperate attempt to find it.

"Ha!" the detective thought, "his escape has been discovered and Boniface is trying to bring him back. Now, it is my power against his."

Springing up he caught Mr. Dillingsworth by the shoulders, swung him around, and forced his eyes to meet his own.

For a moment the old gentleman resisted, but not for long. He ceased speaking, the expression of his face changed, his muscles relaxed, and he became calm.

"Sit down, sir," the detective ordered, and he obeyed.

Gilbert took a seat opposite to him, then, taking care to hold his gaze.

Of a sudden a change came over the old gentleman. His face assumed a new expression. His eyes became bright and flashing—or rather glittered like those of a snake; a satanic smile parted his lips: while at the same time his brows contracted into a scowl. It was the face of a demon.

"Ha, ha, ha!" the subject—the automaton—broke out in a blood-chilling laugh, and then followed:

"They defy me, they all defy me, but how little they know of the power I possess! I will teach them who is their master. They shall die, they shall die this night, and by my hand! Ha, ha, ha! Then all will be mine—mine! Oh! how I long to drive this dagger into their hearts! I will spare none—not one."

There was a pause of several moments.

Suddenly the mesmerized man spoke again.

"Why waste time?" he cried, and the detective recognized the voice of Boniface. "I will carry it out now—at once. I know what I can do, and I will do it."

Detective Johns entered the room, and Gilbert motioned him to be silent.

"Yes, this very night shall they die, and by my hand!" the automaton continued. "This dagger shall drink its fill of their hearts' blood! And my beloved—oh! my dearly beloved!—nephew and niece shall be the first victims. And if I am discovered—Ha, ha, ha! They will discover not me, but Alexis Knight. It is in his person that I intend to act, and not in my own. And if arrested—I defy them! I will send for 'Father Boniface,' and, presto! I will go free and Alexis will be hanged. Oh! if they only knew my power!"

Another momentary pause.

"Yes, yes, I will do it!" were the next words uttered. "I will call Alexis to me; I will place him under my control; I will perform my grand experiment of transmutation, and then in his form I will go forth and do my work. Oh! they shall die—they shall die!"

With those words the act ended, for with a groan Mr. Dillingsworth fell senseless from his chair to the floor.

"Send for a doctor, quick!" Gilbert of Gotham ordered, and John sprung to obey.

Having dispatched a servant on the errand, he returned to the room.

Gilbert had lifted the victim to the bed, and was doing his best to revive him.

"This is the devil's own work," exclaimed Johns, as he hastened to assist him.

"I am willing to agree with you," Gilbert answered, "and we must take a hand in it. As soon as the doctor arrives we must leave Mr. Dillingsworth to him and the servants, and go to the rescue of those who are threatened with such danger."

A doctor soon came, and Gilbert told him as much of the case as he considered necessary.

The doctor set to work, and in a short time Mr. Dillingsworth came to, in his right mind.

"Where am I?" he demanded, as he looked around in a most thoroughly bewildered way.

Gilbert explained, and after a few minutes the old man was almost himself again.

The doctor gave him a simple nervine, and also a sleeping potion, at the detective's request, and said the man was only suffering from a great nervous strain.

When the doctor was gone, then Detective Johns gave his servants full instructions, and Gilbert and he left the house.

"They went at once, and with all haste, to the Dillingsworth mansion.

There they saw Clarence Dillingsworth, and, while they did not let him into the secret, they impressed him with the importance of their request and won him to their assistance.

Detective Johns remained there, but Gilbert, as soon as their plans were thoroughly understood, left the house and hastened away.

The end was at hand.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DOUBLE DEATH.

THE words spoken by Edmund Dillingsworth, when he was under the mesmeric control of both his brother Boniface and Gilbert of Gotham, were the spoken thoughts of the former.

And a horrible revelation it was.

About the time when Edmund gave way under the terrible strain, and became unconscious, Boniface was at the height of his passion.

Whether he was insane, or whether he was possessed of demons the most satanic, is for the reader to judge.

Certainly his was an evil nature, but for him to become so suddenly beside himself with blind rage seemed to point to madness.

But, if mad, he was a demon none the less, and deserved the awful fate that was in store for him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he continued to rave, "but I have the best of them yet! I hold their lives in my hand, and it will do me good to see my little beauty here drink their watery blood."

As he spoke he caressed the dagger.

"The first blow for Clarence, the second for his fool of a sister, and then for blood—blood! Oh! how the red blood shall run! Little do they know how affectionate I am, and the power I have. The power—I cannot measure it myself; but I know what I can do, and I will do it. I can put my spirit into the body of Alexis Knight, and his into mine. I have done the trick a dozen times with Edmund."

Up and down the room he paced, his anger none the less great, but he was able to control it better.

He had recalled his thoughts from Edmund now, having decided that beyond a doubt he should find him at home.

Presently he pulled a bell-rope.

In a few moments one of his underlings answered the call.

"Send Alexis Knight to me at once," the general ordered.

The underling bowed and disappeared, and in a short time Knight came into the room.

"You sent for me?" he questioned.

"Yes," Boniface answered, "I sent for you. Sit down."

Knight obeyed.

Boniface had put the dagger away out of sight, and he now appeared to be quite calm. No vestige of the recent storm was to be seen.

"What do you want?" Knight asked.

"I will tell you in a few minutes," the elder man said, as he pulled his chair around facing him.

"In the first place," Boniface announced, "I have startling news for you."

"What is it?"

"Our prisoner has escaped!"

"Escaped!"

"Yes. I went in to see him a few minutes ago, to give him the news you brought me, and found him gone."

"How did he escape?"

"Ben has played us false, as I believe. The door was locked, as it should be, but the prisoner was gone."

"It is incomprehensible. I have always considered Ben Hickens as good as gold."

"Well, he has proved false, and he shall pay for it with his life."

While talking, Boniface had kept his eyes fixed upon the young man's face, and it was not long before Knight was under his control.

"Stand up!" Boniface ordered.

Knight obeyed.

"Sit down!"

This order, too, was promptly obeyed.

Several other simple orders were given, until Boniface was satisfied that he had the young man under complete control.

"Now," he mused, "the first step is taken, and the rest will be easy. But, I must wait for time."

He lighted a cigar, and taking up a book, began to read.

He read on until one o'clock.

"Now," he muttered, "the hour is at hand. My mind is fully made up. The crimes cannot

be traced to me, even if I am caught. *I will do it.*"

All this time Alexis Knight had been sitting like a statue—without a movement.

Boniface now approached him, laid his hands upon his shoulders, and putting his face close to that of the victim, gazed steadily into his eyes.

For fully ten minutes he stood there, and then a change gradually came over Knight's face. It assumed an expression very like Boniface's. The eyes grew bright, and the young man seemed to be coming out of his trance-like state.

Boniface, too, was undergoing a change. His eyes grew dull, his face took on a vacant expression, and he seemed to be passing into a state similar to that out of which Knight was just awakening.

A few minutes more and Knight roused up, just as Boniface's arms fell from his shoulders, and, had not Knight caught him, he would have fallen to the floor.

Knight was now the active, and Boniface the passive; Knight the animate, Boniface the inanimate.

Holding Boniface up, Knight turned him around and placed him in the chair from which he had just risen.

"There," he said, "it is done. Here am I, Boniface Dillingsworth; and there, *his* spirit in my body, sits Alexis Knight. What a perfect disguise! Can any detective improve it? can any detective *equal* it? Ha, ha, ha!"

It was remarkable.

But, as has been said before, the possibilities of vital magnetism, or hypnotism, are far from being understood, and who can say that transmission is impossible?

Having placed Boniface in the chair and made his position as comfortable as possible, Knight (so we will call the actor) went to the place where Boniface had concealed the dagger, and brought it forth.

"Now, my little beauty, *now*," he said, caressing it in precisely the same manner as Boniface had done; "now you shall drink of blood—*blood!*"

Placing the weapon under his coat, he put on his hat and left the room, and passed out of the house and down to the gate.

There the gateman allowed him to depart, and Knight informed him that he was going out on business and would return within an hour or two, cautioning him to be awake to admit him.

Then the would-be murderer set out in the direction of the Dillingsworth mansion.

But after him, like a shadow, followed Gilbert of Gotham.

When they reached the house, the detective saw Knight unlock and enter a door that led around to the rear area.

The detective ran quickly up to the front door, then gave two light raps, and was at once admitted by his assistant, Johns.

A few words were hastily exchanged, and then Gilbert ran up to Clarence's room and concealed himself in the hall.

Five minutes passed.

Then Johns heard a slight noise, and presently saw Knight, in the dim light, creeping along toward the stairs.

He gained them and ascended, and the detective silently followed.

The intending assassin went straight to Clarence Dillingsworth's room. The door was unlocked, and he entered without any trouble. But he used the utmost caution.

No sooner had he entered than Johns was at the door, holding a bull's-eye lantern, ready to flash a light upon the scene the instant the signal was given.

Once inside the room, Knight crouched down and advanced to the bed.

There was enough light to see objects semi-distinctly, and in the bed was what seemed to be the form of a man.

Without a sound the villain crossed the floor until he reached the bed, then he rose up, and the next instant his dagger was raised and brought down with all the force he could command.

But it found no victim, for what he had taken to be Clarence Dillingsworth was only a dummy.

With a gasp of alarm the wretch sprang back and then the steel-like arms of Gilbert of Gotham were flung around him.

"Light!" Gilbert called, and instantly the door was flung open and Johns stood there with his lantern turned upon them, while Clarence appeared from an adjoining room.

"Boniface Dillingsworth, your game is ended!" the detective hissed into the ear of his prisoner. "I know you—I know your secret."

"What! you know me?" the demon of darkness cried, and instantly his only thought was of escape.

With a sudden show of strength that was almost marvelous, he tore himself out of the detective's grasp and sprang toward the door.

There he was met by a revolver in Detective Johns's steady hand.

Balked in that direction, he turned, now unarmed, like a tiger at bay.

"Surrender!" cried Gilbert of Gotham, as he drew his revolver, "surrender! or I will kill you like a dog."

"Surrender—*never!*" the baffled wretch cried. "I defy you—I defy you all!"

Like a flash he turned and sprang toward a window, and, before any one could divine his intention, he hurled himself through it.

His intention was suicide, and, as this window was in the third story of the house, he did not fail in his purpose.

When Gilbert Johns, and Clarence reached the ground, they found the body of Alexis Knight lying there in a pool of blood, crushed and lifeless.

Gilbert called for police assistance, and as soon as possible the body was removed to the morgue.

The alarm in the household was great, as was the excitement in the street, but the detectives, assisted by Clarence, soon explained what had happened, or as much as was necessary, and order and quiet were restored.

With our privilege, let us glance at Boniface Dillingsworth at the time these tragic events were happening.

We left him seated in the chair where Knight had placed him.

At the precise moment when the hands of Gilbert of Gotham were laid upon Knight, and the latter was fairly caught in the act of his intended crime, Boniface sprang from the chair with a cry of alarm.

"Where am I?" he exclaimed. "What has happened! I— Oh! I remember now; I am here in Boniface's room. He sent for me. But, where is he?"

The man looked around as though bewildered.

The next moment, the exact moment when Knight hurled himself from the window, he threw up his arms, screaming:

"Oh! Help! Oh! I fall! I fall!"

His cries rung through the house, startling all the inmates, and as he uttered the last word he fell to the floor—*dead*.

Doors were heard opening and shutting, footsteps sounded, and in a moment more the startled inmates of the house poured into the room.

On the floor lay Father Boniface, dead.

Was it murder? What of the startling cries? The body was examined. No trace or mark of violence could be found. It was shown that Alexis Knight had been with him during the evening. Loud, angry voices had been heard. Where was Knight now? He had left the house nearly half an hour previously to the time when the cries were heard. It was a mystery.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LOST IS FOUND.

"MITHTER JAYBIRD, I believe you are a—aw—a demmed wathcal; I do, bah Jove!"

E. Claude Montpensier.

This was two weeks or so after the eventful night of the preceding chapter.

The dude had called at the office of the great lawyer-detective for the last time.

He was beginning to get his eyes opened.

He had paid the "detective" nearly four hundred dollars, and now the greedy pettifogger made a demand for another "modest" fee.

The dude wisely refused.

Some sharp words followed, which ended with the dude's declaring himself in the language quoted.

"W—what!" cried Jaybird, "do you mean to insinuate that I am a cheat, sir—a *cheat*?"

"I do, bah Jove!" E. Claude bravely declared. "I—aw—I don't believe you have laid out ten thenth of my money in any honest thearch for the dawg; not *ten thenth*, thir!"

"Sir, how *dare* you?" cried Jaybird. "Do you know who you are talking to? I ought to arrest you and sue you for libel, sir. Here," snatching a bundle of papers from a drawer, "here are receipts for every cent expended, sir, *every cent*. I have kept a strict account of—"

"Aw—all wight, thir, all wight," the dude interrupted, as he backed toward the door; "don't get angwy, thir, pway don't! You have bled me pretty fweely, thir, but you cawn't bleed me any more. And you cawn't change my opinion, either; no, bah Jove!"

"Go, sir, go!" cried Jaybird. "Leave my office instantly. You insult me, sir. You insult me. And after all I have done in your service—Go, sir, go!"

"Aw—yeth thir, I'm—aw—I'm goin'," returned E. Claude, who lacked the nerve to contest the point: "allow me to thay good-day, thir." And slamming the door "weal loud," he left the building.

The moment Jaybird was alone, he lay back in his chair and laughed long and heartily, but silently.

Presently the door opened, and in popped The Mouse.

"Hullo, Old Rocks!" he exclaimed, "how does it work? Any more two-dollar jobs fer me?"

"No more at present," the lawyer replied.

"How is that?"

"The young man has refused to pay me any

more money, and has taken the case out of my hands."

The Mouse laughed. "I rather expected he would, sooner or later," he declared. "Shows he's got a little sense left. Well, I ain't growlin'; I have made quite a stake out o' the case."

"Yes, so you have."

"Well, so long, Rocks! I must be goin'. If ye want me again you know where I hang out. Tra-la-la-loo!" And with his sweeping bow The Mouse took his leave.

The moment he reached the street he hastened away in search of the dude. He had shadowed him before, and knew where he lived, so he looked for no trouble in finding him.

Walking at a lively pace in the direction he had seen the dude take, he soon saw him ahead, walking slowly.

"Skuse me, sir," he said, "but ain't you th' feller that's lookin' fer a lost dorg?"

E. Claude stopped at once.

"Yeth," he responded, "I am; but who are you?"

"I'm a feller what's found a dorg," the sharp young man explained, "an' hearin' Jaybird an' his mighty detectives talkin' 'bout your case one day" (a lie out of whole cloth,) "I thought mebby th' dorg I've found might be yourn."

E. Claude was greatly excited.

"If it ith, bah Jovel! I'll give you twenty-five dollahs!"

The Mouse almost fainted.

He had long been debating with himself whether he should "strike" the dude for a "fiver" or an "X," and now the offer of twenty-five dollars fairly took away his breath.

"What sort o' dorg was yourn?" he asked, as soon as he recovered.

"It wath a little dawg of a vewy pwetty color; had a gold-mounted collar with the name 'Claude' on it; and altho a vewy pwetty wibon, about a yard, a yard and a half, or two yardths long."

"That's him!" cried The Mouse; "that's th' same purp, sure! He's got th' collar, but th' ribbon is sorter non est—ez it were, as Jailbird says."

"Heaventh be pwaithed!" exclaimed the happy dude. "And where ith the deah little cweature?" he asked.

"Come right along o' me," said The Mouse, "an' I'll show ye. I've got him ter home. Not a very high-toned place, but the best I've got. Come right along."

E. Claude followed willingly.

He fairly walked on air. Now once more did the future look bright. If he could only restore his lady love's dog, he felt that he could win her hand.

The Mouse led him straight to where he had the dog concealed, and allowed him to see it.

It was, indeed, the lost Claude. And as The Mouse had taken good care of it, he seeing a sure thing ahead, it was as fat as a well-fed little bear.

"Oh! I'm tho glad!" the dude cried, as he clapped his daintily-gloved hands, "tho glad!"

The Mouse had been thinking the case over a little. If the dude was so willing to pay twenty-five dollars where he had not expected to get more than five—or ten at most, might he not be induced to pay more?

Varily, "man wants but little here below," but at the same time he seems to want a good deal of it.

"Now, mister," The Mouse said, "I don't want to be rough on ye, but you see how well I've kept this here purp fer ye, an' don't ye think ye might give me—give me—er—say fifty cases?"

"Fifty what?"

"Cases—dollars."

"Well, aw—weally that ith a little thteep, don't you think tho? But, ath thith ith a thure thing, I will. It ith awful, though, to think of the money thith dawg hath coht me. Would you believe it," as he placed fifty dollars in The Mouse's trembling hand, "that I have paid Mithter Jaybird nearly four hundred dollahth?"

The Mouse was knocked speechless. He could not believe the evidence of his own eyes and ears. Here in his own hands was fifty dollars, and here was proof that Jaybird had made nearly eight times as much. "Was he awake?"

"What ith the matter?" inquired E. Claude. "Ithn't the money good?"

"Oh! er—yes, yes; it's good enough, you bet! I was only a-thinkin'. Beg yer parding. Here, here's yer dorg, mister, an' much 'bliged."

So the dog was delivered, and E. Claude walked off a proud and happy man.

He went immediately and with all haste to the home of the fair Antoinette.

"My deah, deah, DEAH Mith' De Thymthe," he cried excitedly, as he rushed into her presence without hardly waiting to be announced. "I am the happiest man in the whole world! I am, bah Jovel!"

Antoinette saw and recognized the lost Claude.

"Oh! you dear, dear good fellow!" she cried, "you have really restored my pet to my arms, as you vowed you would! Oh! how happy—how happy you have made me!"

In her excitement she ran forward and actual-

ly embraced her lover and her dog at the same time.

And in his excitement, E. Claude embraced her, much to her satisfaction.

When the first blush of their excitement was over, and they sat down, Antoinette remarked.

"What an awful amount of trouble and expense you have put yourself to, just to please me."

"And why should I not?" demanded the lover, "when I—when it wath all my fault. And the expenth', it wath a mere twife; it wath not four 'hundwed and fifty dollahth—a mere nothing."

"Oh! it was a great deal!"

"And ath for the twouble, it wath no twouble at all. You thee the detective did all the work."

"Yes, but it is to you, and to you only, that I am thankful."

"Oh! how happy you make me! Wordth fail to expweth my happineth."

"And how happy I am!"

E. Claude hesitated no longer.

Throwing himself upon his knees before the idol of his heart, he poured out his soul in these words:

"Deah Mith' De Thymthe—deah Antoinette! I can wethitht no longer. I mutht open my heart and thpweth it out at your feet. I love you—madly, devotedly and twuly love you! and I mutht athk you to become my wife. Oh! do not wefuth' me; do not, oh! do not, I pway! but tell me that you will be mine, and make me by far the vewy happiest man on earth."

"But, dear Claude, this is so sudden—so unexpected, that—"

"No, no, it ith not thudden at all; that ith to thay—I have been thinking of it for a vewy long while; but I had not the couwage to athk you for your hand until I wcovered your pet dawg and wethored him to your loving armth. Oh! if you only knew how much I love you! If tongue could only tell! I am thure you would take pity on me."

E. Claude pleaded his cause well, and in the end Antoinette gave him the word he begged for.

She promised to become his.

It was the happiest moment of his life, and of hers.

A few months later they were married, and it is to be hoped that, as all good-old-fashioned stories used to end, "they lived happy ever after."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONCLUSION.

OUR romance ends.

All that remains to be told, the imagination can readily supply.

It may be well, however, to add a few words more, since there are a few points yet to be explained.

The Dillingsworth affair was never made public, but was hushed up as speedily as possible. Boniface was buried with due respect, but the Order of which he had been the head was compelled to disband. Many other crimes of more or less importance were traced to Boniface, but as he was beyond the reach of human justice, they were not brought up. Edmund, though, did all in his power to make whatever restitutions he could.

And the Goldsmith diamonds—they were all recovered, thanks to Mrs. Clementine, who, by the way, was really Mrs. Nathan Gilbert. The diamonds had been stolen by Charlotte's maid, Fanny, and delivered to Thorne Oldwood. Both were sent to prison for several years.

Edmund fully recovered his health, and he and Mr. Goldsmith are to day two of the happiest old men the city can show. The story that Mr. Goldsmith's first wife was living, proved, upon investigation to be wholly false. She had died as had been first reported.

The secret marriages were speedily made public, some trifling reasons being given to satisfy Dame Curiosity; and Clarence Dillingsworth and Charlotte, and Julian Gladstone and Effie, are enjoying happy, prosperous and useful lives.

Need more be said? in short, the good were rewarded and the evil were punished.

The detective agency of which Gilbert of Gotham is the head still flourishes, and the Steel Arm Detective's best assistants are his own wife, who takes pleasure in the work, and Detective Johns.

Lawyer Jaybird, too, is still around, and is not the only one of his kind in the great city.

And "The Mouse," still performs the petti-fogger's dirty work. He has never been able to prove his ability as a detective, and never will be, but he does not allow Jaybird to distance him in the race after the "mighty dollar."

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- 92 Canada Chet; or, Old Anacanda in Sitting Bull's Camp.
- 96 Watch-Eye; or, Arabs and Angels of a Great City.
- 113 Jack Hoyle, the Young Speculator.
- 117 Gilt-Edged Dick, the Sport Detective.
- 121 Cinnamon Chip, the Girl Sport.
- 125 Bonanza Bill, Miner.
- 133 Boss Bob, the King of Bootblacks.
- 141 Solid Sam, the Boy Road-Agent.
- 145 Captain Ferret, the New York Detective; or, Boss Bob's Boss Job.
- 161 New York Nell, the Boy-Girl Detective.
- 177 Nobby Nick of Nevada; or, The Sierras Scamps.
- 181 Wild Frank, the Buckskin Bravo.
- 209 Fritz, the Bound-Boy Detective.
- 213 Fritz to the Front; or, The Ventriloquist Hunter.
- 226 Snoozer, the Boy Sharp; or, The Arab Detective.
- 236 Apollo Bill, the Trail Tornado.
- 240 Cyclone Kit, the Young Gladiator.
- 244 Sierra Sam, the Frontier Ferret.
- 248 Sierra Sam's Secret; or, The Bloody Footprints.
- 253 Sierra Sam's Pard; or, The Angel of Big Vista.
- 258 Sierra Sam's Seven; or, The Stolen Bride.
- 273 Jumbo Joe, the Boy Patrol; or, The Riv. Lairs.
- 277 Denver Doll, the Detective Queen.
- 281 Denver Doll's Victory.
- 285 Denver Doll's Decoy; or, Little Bill's Bonanza.
- 291 Turk, the Boy Ferret.
- 296 Denver Doll's Drift; or, The Road Queen.
- 299 A No. 1, the Dashing Toll-Taker.
- 308 Liza Jane, the Girl Miner; or, the Iron-Nerved Sport.
- 325 Kelley, Hickey & Company, the Sleuths of Philadelphia.
- 330 Little Quick-Shot; or, The Dead Face of Daggersville.
- 334 Kangaroo Kit; or, The Mysterious Miner.
- 339 Kangaroo Kit's Racket.
- 343 Manhattan Mike, the Bowery Blood.
- 358 First-Class Fred, the Gent from Gopher.
- 368 Yreka Jim, the Gold-Gatherer; or, The Lottery of Life.
- 373 Yreka Jim's Prize.
- 378 Nabob Ned; or, The Secret of Slab City.
- 382 Cool Kit, the King of Kids; or, A Villain's Vengeance.
- 385 Yreka Jim's Joker; or, The Rivals of Red Nose.
- 389 Bleyele Ben; or, The Lion of Lightning Lode.
- 394 Yreka Jim of Yuba Dam.
- 400 Wrinkles, the Night-Watch Detective.
- 416 High Hat Harry, the Base Ball Detective.
- 426 Sam Slabside, the Beggar-Boy Detective.
- 434 Jim Beak and Pal, Private Detectives.
- 438 Santa Fe Sal, the Slasher.
- 456 Sealskin Sam, the Sparkler.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 11 The Two Detectives; or, The Fortunes of a Bowery Girl.
- 76 Abe Colt, the Crow-Killer.
- 79 Sol Ginger, the Giant Trapper.
- 238 Joe Buck of Angels and His Boy Pard.
- 447 New York Nat. A Tale of Tricks and Traps in Gotham.
- 458 New England Nick; or, The Fortunes of a Foundling.
- 464 Nimble Nick, the Circus Prince.
- 493 Taos Ted, the Arizona Sport.
- 510 Cool Colorado, the Half-Breed Detective.
- 518 Cool Colorado in New York.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

- 7 The Flying Yankee; or, The Ocean Outcast.
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- 24 Diamond Dick; or, The Mystery of the Yellowstone.
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- 73 The Boy Duellist; or, The Cruise of the Sea-Wolf.
- 102 Dick Dead-Eye, the Boy Smuggler.
- 111 The Sea-Devil; or, The Midshipman's Legacy.
- 116 The Hussar Captain; or, The Hermit of Hell Gate.
- 197 Little Grit; or, Bessie, the Stock-Tender's Daughter.
- 204 Gold Plume; or, The Kid-Glove Sport.
- 216 Bison Bill, the Prince of the Plains.
- 222 Grit, the Bravo Sport; or, The Woman Trailer.
- 229 Crimson Kate; or, The Cowboy's Triumph.
- 237 Lone Star, the Cowboy Captain.
- 245 Merle, the Middy; or, The Freestone Heir.
- 250 The Midshipman Mutineer; or, Brandt, the Buccaneer.
- 264 The Floating Feather; or, Merle Monte's Treasure Island.
- 269 The Gold Ship; or, Merle, the Condemned.
- 276 Merle Monte's Cruise; or, The Chase of "The Gold Ship."
- 280 Merle Monte's Fate; or, Pearl, the Pirate's Bride.
- 284 The Sea Marauder; or, Merle Monte's Pledge.
- 287 Billy Blue-Eyes, the Boy Rover of the Rio Grande.
- 304 The Dead Shot Dandy; or, Benito, the Boy Bugler.
- 308 Kene Kit; or, Dead Shot Dandy's Double.
- 314 The Mysterious Marauder; or, The Boy Bugler's Long Trail.
- 377 Bonodel, the Boy Rover; or, The Flagless Schooner.
- 383 The Indian Pilot; or, The Search for Pirate Island.
- 387 Warpath Will, the Boy Phantom.
- 398 Seawall, the Boy Lieutenant.
- 402 Isador, the Young Conspirator; or, The Fatal League.
- 407 The Boy Insurgent; or, The Cuban Vendetta.
- 412 The Wild Yachtsman; or, The War-Cloud's Cruise.
- 429 Duncan Dare, the Boy Refugee.
- 438 A Cabin Boy's Luck; or, The Corsair.
- 437 The Sea Raider.
- 441 The Ocean Firefly; or, A Middy's Vengeance.
- 446 Haphazard Harry; or, The Scapegrace of the Sea.
- 450 Wizard Will; or, The Boy Ferret of New York.
- 454 Wizard Will's Street Scouts.
- 462 The Born Guide; or, The Sailor Boy Wanderer.
- 468 Neptune Ned, the Boy Conator.
- 474 Flora; or, Wizard Will's Vagabond Pard.
- 483 Ferrets Aloft; or, Wizard Will's Last Case.
- 487 Nevada Ned, the Revolver Ranger.
- 495 Arizona Joe, the Boy Pard of Texas Jack.
- 497 Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys.
- 508 The Royal Middy; or, The Shark and the Sea Cat.
- 507 The Hunted Midshipman.
- 511 The Outlawed Middy.
- 520 Buckskin Bill, the Comanche Shadow.
- 525 Brothers in Buckskin.

BY CHARLES MORRIS.

- 118 Will Somers, the Boy Detective.
- 122 Phil Hardy, the Boss Boy.
- 126 Picayune Pete; or, Nicodemus, the Dog Detective.
- 130 Detective Dick; or, The Hero in Rags.
- 142 Handsome Harry, the Bootblack Detective.
- 147 Will Wildfire, the Thoroughbred.
- 152 Black Bess, Will Wildfire's Race.
- 157 Mike Merry, the Harbor Police Boy.
- 162 Will Wildfire in the Woods.
- 165 Billy Baggage, the Railroad Boy.
- 170 A Trump Card; or, Will Wildfire Wins and Loses.
- 174 Bob Rockett; or, Mysteries of New York.
- 179 Bob Rockett, the Bank Runner.
- 183 The Hidden Hand; or, Will Wildfire's Revenge.
- 187 Fred Halyard, the Life Boat Boy; or, The Smugglers.
- 189 Bob Rockett; or, Driven to the Wall.
- 196 Shadowed; or, Bob Rockett's Fight for Life.
- 206 Dark Paul, the Tiger King.
- 212 Dashing Dave, the Dandy Detective.
- 220 Tom Tanner; or, The Black Sheep of the Flock.
- 225 Sam Charcoal, the Premium Dandy.
- 235 Shadow Sam, the Messenger Boy.
- 242 The Two "Bloods"; or, Shenandoah Bill and His Gang.
- 252 Dick Dashaway; or, A Dakota Boy in Chicago.
- 262 The Young Sleuths; or, Rollicking Mike's Hot Trail.
- 274 Jolly Jim, the Detective Apprentice.
- 289 Jolly Jim's Job; or, The Young Detective.
- 298 The Water-Hound; or, The Young Thoroughbred.
- 305 Dashaway, of Dakota; or, A Western Lad in the Quaker City.
- 334 Ralph Ready, the Hotel Boy Detective.
- 341 Tony Thorne, the Vagabond Detective.
- 353 The Reporter-Detective; or, Fred Flyer's Blizzard.
- 367 Wide-Awake Joe; or, A Boy of the Times.
- 379 Larry, the Leveler; or, The Bloods of the Boulevard.
- 403 Firey Jack, the River-Rat Detective.
- 423 The Lost Finger; or, The Entrapped Cashier.
- 428 Fred Flyer, the Reporter Detective.
- 432 Invincible Logan, the Pinkerton Ferret.
- 456 Billy Brick, the Jolly Vagabond.
- 466 Wide-Awake Jerry, Detective; or, Entombed Alive.
- 479 Detective Dodge; or, The Mystery of Frank Hearty.
- 488 Wild Dick Racket.
- 501 Boots, the Boy Fireman; or, Too Sharp for the Sharper.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

- 2 Yellowstone Jack; or, The Trapper.
- 48 Black John, the Road-Agent; or, The Outlaw's Retreat.
- 65 Hurricane Bill; or, Mustang Sam and His Pard.
- 119 Mustang Sam; or, The King of the Plains.
- 136 Night-Hawk Kit; or, The Daughter of the Ranch.
- 144 Dainty Lance, the Boy Sport.
- 151 Panther Paul; or, Dainty Lance to the Rescue.
- 160 The Black Giant; or, Dainty Lance in Jeopardy.
- 168 Deadly Dash; or, Fighting Fire with Fire.
- 184 The Boy Trailers; or, Dainty Lance on the War-Path.
- 203 The Boy Pard; or, Dainty Lance Unmasked.
- 211 Crooked Cale, the Caliban of Celestial City.
- 310 The Barranca Wolf; or, The Beautiful Decoy.
- 319 The Black Rider; or, The Horse-Thieves' League.
- 335 Old Double Flat; or, The Strange Guide.
- 355 The King of the Woods; or, Daniel Boone's Last Trail.
- 449 Kit Fox, the Border Boy Detective.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

- 6 Bill Biddon, Trapper.
- 8 Seth Jones; or, The Captives of the Frontier.
- 10 Nat Todd; or, The Fate of the Sioux Captive.
- 21 The Frontier Angel.
- 95 The Boy Miners; or, The Enchanted Island.
- 132 The Hunted Hunter; or, The Strange Horseman.
- 254 The Half-Blood; or, The Panther of the Plains.
- 271 The Huge Hunter; or, The Steam Prairie Man.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. Wm. F. Cody).

- 3 Kansas King; or, The Red Right Hand.
- 19 The Phantom Spy; or, The Pilot of the Prairie.
- 55 Deadly-Eye, the Unknown Scout.
- 68 Border Robin Hood; or, The Prairie Rover.
- 158 Fanny Frank of Colorado; or, The Trapper's Trust.

BY OLL COOMES.

- 5 Vagabond Joe, the Young Wandering Jew.
- 13 The Dumb Spy.
- 27 Antelope Abe, the Boy Guide.
- 31 Keen-Knife, the Prince of the Prairies.
- 41 Lasso Jack, the Young Mustang.
- 58 The Border King; or, The Secret Foe.
- 71 Delaware Dick, the Young Ranger Spy.
- 74 Hawk-eye Harry, the Young Trapper Ranger.
- 88 Rollo, the Boy Ranger.
- 134 Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman.
- 143 Scar-Face Saul, the Silent Hunter.
- 146 Silver Star, the Boy Knight.
- 153 Eagle Kit, the Boy Demon.
- 163 Little Texas, the Young Mustang.
- 178 Old Solitary, the Hermit Trapper.
- 182 Little Hurricane, the Boy Captain.
- 202 Prospect Pete; or, The Young Outlaw Hunters.
- 208 The Boy Hercules; or, The Prairie Tramps.
- 218 Tiger Tom, the Texas Terror.
- 224 Dashing Dick; or, Trapper Tom's Castle.
- 228 Little Wildfire, the Young Prairie Nomad.
- 238 The Parson Detective; or, The Little Ranger.
- 243 The Disguised Guide; or, Wild Raven, the Ranger.
- 260 Dare-Devil Dan, the Young Prairie Ranger.
- 272 Minkskin Mike, the Boy Sharpshooter.
- 290 Little Foxfire, the Boy Spy.
- 300 The Sky Demon; or, Rainbolt, the Ranger.
- 334 Whip-King Joe, the Boy Ranchero.
- 409 Hercules; or, Dick, the Boy Ranger.
- 417 Webfoot Mose, the Tramp Detective.
- 423 Baby Sam, the Boy Giant of the Yellowstone.
- 444 Little Buckskin, the Young Prairie Centaur.
- 457 Wingedfoot Fred; or, Old Polar Saul.
- 465 Tamarac Tom, the Big Trapper Boy.
- 475 Old Tom Kattler, the Red River Epidemic.
- 483 Stonewall Bob, the Boy Trojan.

BY T. C. HARBAUGH.

- 23 Nick o' the Night; or, The Boy Spy of '76.
- 37 The Hidden Lodge; or, The Little Hunter.
- 47 Nightingale Nat; or, The Forest Captain.
- 64 Dandy Jack; or, The Outlaws of the Oregon Trail.
- 82 Kit Harefoot, the Wood-Hawk.
- 94 Midnight Jack; or, The Boy Trapper.
- 106 Old Frosty, the Guide; or, The White Queen.
- 123 Kiowa Charley, the White Mustang.
- 139 Judge Lynch, Jr.; or, The Boy Vigilante.
- 155 Gold Trigger, the Sport; or, The Girl Avenger.
- 169 Tornado Tom; or, Injun Jack From Red Cere.
- 188 Ned Temple, the Border Boy.
- 198 Arkansas; or, The Queen of Fate's Revenge.
- 207 Navajo Nick, the Boy Gold Hunter.
- 215 Captain Bullet; or, Little Topknot's Crusade.
- 231 Plucky Phil; or, Rosa, the Red Jezebel.
- 241 Bill Bravo; or, The Roughs of the Rockies.
- 255 Captain Apollo, the King-Pin of Bowle.
- 267 The Buckskin Detective.
- 279 Old Winch; or, The Buckskin Desperadoes.
- 294 Dynamite Dan; or, The Bowle Blade of Cochetopa.
- 302 The Mountain Detective; or, The Trigger Bar Bully.
- 316 Old Eclipse, Trump Card of Arizona.
- 326 The Ten Pard; or, The Terror of Take-Notice.
- 336 Big Benson; or, The Queen of the Lasso.
- 345 Pitiless Matt; or, Red Thunderbolt's Secret.
- 354 Cool Sam and Par; or, The Terrible Six.
- 366 Velvet Foot, the Indian Detective.
- 386 Captain Cutlass; or, The Buccaneer's Girl Foe.
- 396 Rough Rob; or, The Twin Champions of Blue Blazes.
- 411 The Silken Lasso; or, The Rose of Ranch Robin.
- 418 Felix Fox, the Boy Spotter.
- 425 Texas Trump, the Border Rattler.
- 436 Phil Flash, the New York Fox.
- 445 The City Sleuths; or, Red Rolfe's Pigeon.
- 461 One Against Fifty; or, The Last Man of Kene Bar.
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- 477 The Excelsior Sport; or, The Washington Spotter.
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- 502 Branded Ben, the Night Ferret.
- 512 Dodger Dick, the Wharf-Spy Detective.
- 521 Dodger Dick's Best Dodge.

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- 268 Magic Mike, the Man of Frills.
- 300 A Sport in Spectacles; or, The Bad Time at Bunco.
- 333 Derringer Dick, the Man with the Drop.
- 344 Double Shot Dave of the Left Hand.
- 356 Three Handsome Sports; or, The Double Combination.
- 375 Royal George, the Three in One.
- 396 The Piper Detective.
- 402 Snapshot Sam; or, The Angels' Flat Racket.
- 429 Hair Trigger Tom of Red Bend.
- 459 Major Sunshine, the Man of Three Lives.

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- 74 The Captain of the Rifles; or, The Queen of the Lakes.
- 200 The Rifle Rangers; or, Adventures in Mexico.
- 208 The White Chief. A Romance of Northern Mexico.
- 213 The War Trail; or, The Hunt of the Wild Horse.
- 218 The Wild Huntress; or, The Squatter's Vengeance.
- 228 The Maroon. A Tale of Voodoo and Obeah.
- 234 The Hunter's Feast.
- 267 The White Squaw.

BY CAPT. FRED. WHITTAKER.

- 39 The Russian Spy; or, The Starry Cross Brothers.
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- 96 Double Death; or, The Spy of Wyoming.
- 98 The Rock Rider; or, The Spirit of the Sierra.
- 108 The Duke of Diamonds.
- 115 The Severed Head; or, The Secret of Castle Coucy.
- 132 Nemo, King of the Tramps.
- 159 Red Rudiger, the Archer.
- 174 The Phantom Knights.
- 187 The Death's Head Cuirassiers.
- 193 The Man in Red.
- 206 One Eye, the Cannoneer.
- 211 Colonel Plunger; or, The Unknown Sport.
- 215 Parson Jim, King of the Cowboys.
- 226 The Mad Hussars; or, The O's and the Mac's.
- 230 The Flying Dutchman of 1880.
- 242 The Fog Devil; or, The Skipper of the Flash.
- 247 Alligator Ike; or, The Secret of the Everglade.
- 253 A Yankee Cossack; or, The Queen of the Nihilists.
- 265 Old Double-Sword; or, Pilots and Pirates.
- 272 Seth Slocum, Railroad Surveyor.
- 277 The Saucy Jane, Privateer.
- 284 The Three Frigates; or, Old Ironsides' Revenge.
- 290 The Lost Corvette; or, Blakeley's Last Cruise.
- 295 Old Cross-Eye, the Maverick-Hunter.
- 303 Top-Notch Tom, the Cowboy Outlaw.
- 310 The Marshal of Satanstown; or, The Cattle-Lifters' League.
- 326 The Whitest Man in the Mines.
- 378 John Armstrong, Mechanic.
- 406 Old Pop Hicks, Showman.
- 412 Larry Locke, the Man of Iron.
- 445 Journeyman John, the Champion.

BY OLL COOMES.

- 7 Death-Notch, the Destroyer.
- 43 Dakota Dan, the Reckless Ranger.
- 44 Old Dan Rackback, the Great Extarminator.
- 46 Bowie-Knife Ben, the Nor'-west Hunter.
- 48 Idaho Tom, the Young Outlaw of Silverland.
- 51 Red Rob, the Boy Road-Agent.
- 99 The Giant Rifleman; or, Wild Camp Life.
- 137 Long Beard, the Giant Spy.
- 143 One-Armed Alf, the Giant Hunter.

BY CAPTAIN MARK WILTON.

- 176 Lady Jaguar, the Robber Queen.
- 191 Don Sombrero, the California Road Gent.
- 202 Cactus Jack, the Giant Guide.
- 219 The Scorpion Brothers; or, Mad Tom's Mission.
- 223 Canyon Dave, the Man of the Mountain.
- 227 Buckshot Ben, the Man-Hunter of Idaho.
- 237 Long-Haired Max; or, The Black League.
- 245 Barranca Bill, the Revolver Champion.
- 258 Bullet Head, the Colorado Bravo.
- 263 Iron-Armed Abe, the Hunchback Destroyer.
- 266 Leopard Luke, the King of Horse-Thieves.
- 271 Stonefist, of Big Nugget Bend.
- 276 Texas Chick, the Southwest Detective.
- 283 Lightning Bolt, the Canyon Terror.
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- 311 Heavy Hand; or, The Marked Men.
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BY SAM S. HALL—"Buckskin Sam."

- 3 Kit Carson, Jr., the Crack Shot.
- 90 Wild Will, the Mad Ranchero.
- 178 Dark Dashwood, the Desperate.
- 186 The Black Bravo; or, The Tonkaway's Triumph.
- 191 The Terrible Tonkaway; or, Old Rocky and his Pards.
- 195 The Lone Star Gambler; or, The Magnolias Maid.
- 199 Diamond Dick, the Dandy from Denver.
- 204 Big Foot Wallace, the King of the Lariat.
- 212 The Brazos Tigers; or, The Minute Men.
- 217 The Serpent of El Paso; or, Frontier Frank.
- 221 Desperate Duke, the Guadalupe "Galoot."
- 225 Rocky Mountain Al; or, The Waif of the Range.
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- 250 The Rough Riders; or, Sharp Eye the Scourge.
- 256 Double Dan the Dastard; or, The Pirates.
- 264 The Crooked Three.
- 269 The Bayou Bravo; or, The Terrible Trail.
- 273 Mountain Mose, the Gorge Outlaw.
- 282 The Merciless Marauders; or, Carl's Revenge.
- 287 Dandy Dave and his Horse, White Stocking.
- 293 Stampede Steve; or, The Doom of the Double Face.
- 301 Boulder Bill; or, The Man from Taos.
- 309 Raybold, the Rattling Ranger.
- 322 The Crimson Coyotes; or, Nita the Nemesis.
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- 13 Pathaway; or, Nick Whiffles, the old Nor'-west Trapper.
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- 73 The Knights of the Red Cross; or, The Granada Magician.
- 163 Ben Brien; or, Redpath, the Avenger.

BY MAJOR DANGERFIELD BURR.

- 92 Buffalo Bill, the Buckskin King.
- 117 Dashing Dandy; or, The Hotspur of the Hills.
- 142 Captain Crimson, the Man of the Iron Face.
- 156 Velvet Face, the Border Bravo.
- 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
- 188 The Phantom Mazeppa; or, The Hyena.
- 448 Hark Kenton, the Traitor.

BY MAJOR DANIEL BOONE DUMONT.

- 333 Silver Sam, the Detective.
- 339 Colonel Double-Edge, the Cattle Baron's Pard.
- 411 The White Crook; or, Old Hark's Fortress.
- 420 The Old River Sport; or, A Man of Honor.
- 439 Salamander Sam.
- 454 The Night Raider.
- 464 Sandycraw, the Man of Grit.

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- 296 Duncan, the Sea Diver.
- 417 Tucson Tom; or, The Fire Trailers.

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- 390 The Giant Cupid; or, Cibuta John's Jubilee.
- 422 Blue Grass Burt, the Gold Star Detective.
- 436 Kentucky Jean, the Sport from Yellow Pine.
- 452 Rainbow Rob, the Tulip from Texas.

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- 398 Sleepless Eye, the Pacific Detective.
- 432 The Giant Horseman.

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- 53 Silver Sam; or, The Mystery of Deadwood City.
- 87 The Scarlet Captain; or, Prisoner of the Tower.
- 106 Shamus O'Brien, the Bould Boy of Glingal.

BY NEWTON M. CURTISS.

- 120 The Texan Spy; or, The Prairie Guide.
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- 136 The Outlaw Hunter; or, The Bush Ranger.
- 138 The Border Bandit; or, The Horse Thief's Trail.

BY C. DUNNING CLARK.

- 164 The King's Fool.
- 183 Gilbert the Guide.

BY COL. THOMAS H. MONSTERY.

- 82 Iron Wrist, the Swordmaster.
- 126 The Demon Duelist; or, The League of Steel.
- 143 The Czar's Spy; or, The Nihilist League.
- 150 El Rubio Bravo, King of the Swordsmen.
- 157 Mourad, the Mameluke; or, The Three Swordmasters.
- 169 Corporal Cannon, the Man of Forty Duels.
- 236 Champion Sam; or, The Monarchs of the Show.
- 262 Fighting Tom, the Terror of the Toughs.
- 332 Spring-Heel Jack; or, The Masked Mystery.

BY ISAAC HAWKS, Ex-Detective.

- 232 Orson Oxx; or, The River Mystery.
- 240 A Cool Head; or, Orson Oxx in Peril.

BY PROF. J. H. INGRAHAM.

- 113 The Sea Slipper; or, The Freebooters.
- 118 The Burglar Captain; or, The Fallen Star.
- 314 Lafitte; or, The Pirate of the Gulf.
- 316 Lafitte's Lieutenant; or, Child of the Sea.

BY GUSTAVE AIMARD.

- 15 The Tiger Slayer; or, Eagle Heart to the Rescue.
- 19 Red Cedar, the Prairie Outlaw.
- 20 The Bandit at Bay; or, The Prairie Pirates.
- 21 The Trapper's Daughter; or, The Outlaw's Fate.
- 24 Prairie Flower.
- 62 Loyal Heart; or, The Trappers of Arkansas.
- 149 The Border Rifles. A Tale of the Texan War.
- 151 The Freebooters. A Story of the Texan War.
- 153 The White Scalper.

MISCELLANEOUS.

- 6 Wildcat Bob, the Boss Bruiser. By Edward L. Wheeler.
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- 152 Captain Ironnerve, the Counterfeiter Chief.
- 158 The Doomed Dozen. By Dr. Frank Powell.
- 166 Owlet, the Robber Prince. By Septimus R. Urban.
- 179 Conrad, the Convict. By Prof. Gildersleeve.
- 190 The Three Guardsmen. By Alexander Dumas.
- 261 Black Sam, the Prairie Thunderbolt. By Col. Jo Yards.
- 275 The Smugler Cutter; or, The Cavern in the Cliff. By J. D. Conroy.
- 312 Kinkfoot Karl, the Mountain Scourge. By Morris Redwing.
- 330 Cop Colt, the Quaker City Detective. By Charles Morris.
- 350 Flash Falcon, the Society Detective. By Weldon J. Cobb.
- 353 Bart Brennan; or, The King of Straight Flush. By John Cuthbert.
- 366 The Telegraph Detective. By George Henry Morse.
- 410 Sarah Brown, Detective. By K. F. Hill.

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BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

- 2 The Dare Devil; or, The Winged Sea Witch.
- 85 The Cretan Rover; or, Zuleikah the Beautiful.
- 89 The Pirate Prince; or, The Queen of the Isle.
- 94 Freelance, the Buccaneer.
- 103 Merle, the Mutineer; or, The Red Anchor Brand.
- 104 Montezuma, the Merciless.
- 109 Captain Kyd, the King of the Black Flag.
- 116 Black Plume; or, The Sorceress of Hell Gate.
- 121 The Sea Cadet; or, The Rover of the Rigoletta.
- 128 The Chevalier Corsair; or, The Heritage.
- 131 Buckskin Sam, the Texas Trail.
- 134 Darkey Dan, the Colored Detective.
- 139 Fire Eye; or, The Bride of a Buccaneer.
- 147 Gold Spur, the Gentleman from Texas.
- 155 The Corsair Queen; or, The Gypsies of the Sea.
- 162 The Mad Mariner; or, Dishonored and Disowned.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.
- 172 Black Pirate; or, The Golden Fetters Mystery.
- 177 Don Diablo, the Planter-Corsair.
- 181 The Scarlet Schooner; or, The Sea Nemesis.
- 184 The Ocean Vampire; or, The Castle Heiress.
- 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 193 The Skeleton Schooner; or, The Skimmer.
- 205 The Gambler Pirate; or, Lady of the Lagoon.
- 210 Buccaneer Bess, the Lioness of the Sea.
- 216 The Corsair Planter; or, Driven to Doom.
- 220 The Specter Yacht; or, A Brother's Crime.
- 224 Black Beard, the Buccaneer.
- 231 The Kid Glove Miner; or, The Magic Doctor.
- 235 Red Lightning the Man of Chance.
- 246 Queen Helen, the Amazon of the Overland.
- 255 The Pirate Priest; or, The Gambler's Daughter.
- 259 Cutlass and Cross; or, the Ghouls of the Sea.
- 261 The Sea Owl; or, The Lady Captain of the Gulf.
- 267 The Phantom Pirate; or, The Water Wolves.
- 278 The Indian Buccaneer; or, The Red Rovers.
- 285 The Gentleman Pirate; or, The Casco Hermit.
- 289 The League of Three; or, Buffalo Bill's Pledge.
- 296 The Magic Ship; or, Sandy Hook Freebooters.
- 341 The Sea Desperado.
- 346 Ocean Guerrillas; or, Phantom Midshipman.
- 362 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 364 The Sea Fugitive; or, The Queen of the Coast.
- 369 The Coast Corsair; or, The Siren of the Sea.
- 373 Sailor of Fortune; or, The Barnegat Buccaneer.
- 377 Afloat and Ashore; or, The Corsair Conspirator.
- 388 The Giant Buccaneer; or, The Wrecker Witch.
- 393 The Convict Captain; or, The Battles of the Buccaneers.
- 399 The New Monte Cristo.
- 418 The Sea Siren; or, The Fugitive Privateer.
- 425 The Sea Sword; or, The Ocean Rivals.
- 430 The Fatal Frigate; or, Rivals in Love and War.
- 435 The One-Armed Buccaneer.
- 446 Ocean Ogre, the Outcast Corsair.
- 457 The Sea Insurgent.

BY WILLIAM H. MANNING.

- 279 The Gold Dragoon, or, The California Blood-hound.
- 297 Colorado Rube, the Strong Arm of Hotspur.
- 335 Wild Dick Turpin, the Leadville Lion.
- 405 Old Baldy, the Brigadier of Buck Basin.
- 415 Hot Heart, the Detective Spy.
- 427 The Rivals of Montana Mill.
- 437 Deep Duk, the Silent Sleuth.
- 442 Wild West Walt, the Mountain Veteran.
- 449 Bluff Burke, King of the Rockies.
- 455 Yank Yellowbird, the Tall Hustler of the Hills.
- 463 Gold Gauntlet, the Gulch Gladiator.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES.

- 278 Hercules Goldspur, the Man of the Velvet Hand.
- 294 Broadcloth Burt, the Denver Dandy.
- 321 California Claude, the Lone Bandit.
- 335 Flash Dan, the Nabob; or, Blades of Bowie Bar.
- 340 Cool Conrad, the Dakota Detective.
- 347 Denver Duke, the Man with "Sand."
- 352 The Desperate Dozen.
- 365 Keen Kennard, the Shasta Shadow.
- 374 Major Blister, the Sport of Two Cities.
- 382 The Bonanza Band; or, Dread Don of Cool Clan.
- 392 The Lost Bonanza; or, The Boot of Silent Hound.
- 400 Captain Coldgrip; or, The New York Spotter.
- 407 Captain Coldgrip's Nerve; or, Injun Nick.
- 413 Captain Coldgrip in New York.
- 421 Father Ferret, the Frisco Shadow.
- 434 Lucifer Lynx, the Wonder Detective.
- 441 The California Sleuth.
- 447 Volcano, the Frisco Spy.
- 453 Captain Coldgrip's Long Trail.
- 460 Captain Coldgrip, the City Sleuth.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS.

- 5 The Fire Fiends; or, Hercules Hunchback.
- 95 Azhort, the Axman; or, The Palace Secrets.
- 100 The French Spy; or, The Bride of Paris.
- 167 The Man of Steel. Tale of Love and Terror.
- 185 Man Spider; or, The Beautiful Sphinx.
- 228 Hank Hound, the Crescent City Detective.
- 260 The Masked Mystery; or, The Black Crescent.
- 288 Electro Pete, the Man of Fire.
- 306 The Roughs of Richmond.
- 313 Mark Magic, Detective.
- 324 The Cipher Detective; or, Mark Magic's New Trail.
- 343 The Head Hunter; or, Mark Magic in the Mine.
- 357 Jack Simons, Detective.

BY BUFFALO BILL (Hon. W. F. Cody).

- 53 Death-Tracker, the Chief of Scouts.
- 83 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.

BY JOSEPH E. BADGER, JR.

- 23 Three-Fingered Jack, the Road-Agent.
- 30 Gospel George; or, Flery Fred, the Outlaw.
- 40 Long-Haired Pards; or, The Tartars of the Plains.
- 45 Old Bull's-Eye, the Lightning Shot.
- 47 Pacific Pete, the Prince of the Revolver.
- 50 Jack Rabbit, the Prairie Sport.
- 64 Double-Sight, the Death Shot.
- 67 The Boy Jockey; or, Honesty vs. Crookedness.
- 71 Captain Cool Blade; or, Mississippi Man Shark.
- 88 Big George; or, The Five Outlaw Brothers.
- 105 Dan Brown of Denver; or, The Detective.
- 119 Alabama Joe; or, The Yazoo Man-Hunters.
- 127 Sol Scott, the Masked Miner.
- 141 Equinox Tom, the Bully of Red Rock.
- 154 Joaquin, the Saddle King.
- 165 Joaquin, the Terrible.
- 170 Sweet William, the Trapper Detective.
- 180 Old '49; or, The Amazon of Arizona.
- 197 Revolver Rob; or, The Belle of Nugget Camp.
- 201 Pirate of the Placers; or, Joaquin's Death Hunt.
- 233 The Old Boy of Tombstone.
- 241 Spitfire Saul, King of the Rustlers.
- 249 Elephant Tom, of Durango.
- 257 Death Trap Diggings; or, A Hard Man from 'Way Back.
- 283 Sleek Sam, the Devil of the Mines.
- 286 Pistol Johnny; or, One Man in a Thousand.
- 292 Moke Horner, the Boss Roustabout.
- 302 Faro Saul, the Handsome Hercules.
- 317 Frank Lightfoot, the Miner Detective.
- 324 Old Forked Lightning, the Solitary.
- 331 Chispa Charley, the Gold Nugget Sport.
- 339 Spread Eagle Sam, the Hercules Hide Hunter.
- 345 Masked Mark, the Mounted Detective.
- 351 Nor' West Nick, the Border Detective.
- 355 Stormy Steve, the Mad Athlete.
- 360 Jumping Jerry, the Gamecock from Sundown.
- 367 A Royal Flush; or, Dan Brown's Big Game.
- 372 Captain Crisp, the Man with a Record.
- 379 Howling Jonathan, the Terror from Headwaters.
- 387 Dark Durg, the Ishmael of the Hills.
- 395 Deadly Aim, the Duke of Derringers.
- 403 The Nameless Sport.
- 409 Rob Roy Ranch; or, The Imps of Pan Handle.
- 416 Monte Jim, the Black Sheep of Bismarck.
- 426 The Ghost Detective; or, The Spy of the Secret Service.
- 433 Laughing Leo; or, Sam's Dandy Pard.
- 438 Oklahoma Nick.
- 443 A Cool Hand; or, Pistol Johnny's Picnic.
- 450 The Rustler Detective.
- 458 Dutch Dan, the Pilgrim from Spitzenberg.
- 466 Old Rough and Ready, the Sage of Sundown.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
- 203 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
- 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
- 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
- 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
- 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
- 298 Logger Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
- 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
- 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
- 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
- 337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
- 348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
- 368 The Canyon King; or, a Price on his Head.

BY LEON LEWIS.

- 423 The Flying Glim; or, The Island Lure.
- 456 The Demon Steer.

BY NED BUNTLINE.

- 14 Thayendanegea, the Scourge; or, The War-Eagle.
- 16 The White Wizard; or, The Seminole Prophet.
- 18 The Sea Bandit; or, The Queen of the Isle.
- 23 The Red Warrior; or, The Comanche Lover.
- 61 Captain Seawaif, the Privateer.
- 111 The Smuggler Captain; or, The Skipper's Crime.
- 122 Saul Sabberday, the Idiot Spy.
- 270 Andros the Rover; or, The Pirate's Daughter.
- 361 Tombstone Dick, the Train Pilot.

BY JACKSON KNOX—"Old Hawk."

- 386 Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective.
- 424 Hawk Heron's Deputy.
- 444 The Magic Detective; or, The Hidden Hand.
- 451 Griplock, the Rocket Detective.
- 462 The Circus Detective.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

- 57 The Silent Hunter.
- 86 The Big Hunter; or, The Queen of the Woods.

BY PHILIP S. WARNE.

- 1 A Hard Crowd; or, Gentleman Sam's Sister.
- 4 The Kidnapper; or, The Northwest Shanghai.
- 29 Tiger Dick, Faro King; or, The Cashier's Crime.
- 54 Always on Hand; or, The Foot-Hills Sport.
- 80 A Man of Nerve; or, Caliban the Dwarf.
- 114 The Gentleman from Pike.
- 171 Tiger Dick, the Man of the Iron Heart.
- 207 Old Hard Head; or, Whirlwind and his Mare.
- 251 Tiger Dick vs. Iron Despard.
- 280 Tiger Dick's Lone Hand.
- 299 Three of a Kind; or, Tiger Dick, Iron Despard and the Sportive Sport.
- 338 Jack Sands, the Boss of the Town.
- 359 Yellow Jack, the Mestizo.
- 380 Tiger Dick's Pledge; or, The Golden Serpent.
- 404 Silver Sid; or, A "Daisy" Bluff.
- 431 California Kit, the Always on Hand.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

- 27 The Spotter Detective; or, Girls of New York.
- 31 The New York Sharp; or, The Flash of Lightning.
- 33 Overland Kit; or, The Idyl of White Pine.
- 34 Rocky Mountain Rob, the California Outlaw.
- 35 Kentuck the Sport; or, Dick Talbot of the Mines.
- 36 Injun Dick; or, The Death-Shot of Shasta.
- 38 Velvet Hand; or, Injun Dick's Iron Grip.
- 41 Gold Dan; or, The White Savage of Salt Lake.
- 42 The California Detective; or, The Witches of N.Y.
- 49 The Wolf Demon; or, The Kanawha Queen.
- 56 The Indian Mazeppa; or, Madman of the Plains.
- 59 The Man from Texas; or, The Arkansas Outlaw.
- 63 The Winged Whale; or, The Red Rupert of Gulf.
- 72 The Phantom Hand; or, The 5th Avenue Heiress.
- 75 Gentleman George; or, Parlor, Prison and Street.
- 77 The Fresh of Frisco; or, The Heiress.
- 79 Joe Phenix, the Police Spy.
- 81 The Human Tiger; or, A Heart of Fire.
- 84 Hunted Down; or, The League of Three.
- 91 The Winning Oar; or, The Innkeeper's Daughter.
- 93 Captain Dick Talbot, King of the Road.
- 97 Bronze Jack, the California Thoroughbred.
- 101 The Man from New York.
- 107 Richard Talbot, of Cinnabar.
- 112 Joe Phenix, Private Detective.
- 130 Captain Volcano; or, The Man of Red Revolver.
- 161 The Wolves of New York; or, Joe Phenix's Hunt.
- 173 California John, the Pacific Thoroughbred.
- 196 La Marmoset, the Detective Queen.
- 203 The Double Detective; or, The Midnight Mystery.
- 252 The Wall Street Blood; or, The Telegraph Girl.
- 320 The Genteel Spotter; or, The N. Y. Night Hawk.
- 349 Iron-Hearted Dick, the Gentleman Road-Agent.
- 354 Red Richard; or, The Crimson Cross Brand.
- 363 Crowningshield, the Sleuth; or, Pitiless as Death.
- 370 The Dusky Detective; or, Pursued to the End.
- 376 Black Beards; or, The Rio Grande High Horse.
- 381 The Gypsy Gentleman; or, Nick Fox, Detective.
- 384 Injun Dick, Detective; or, Tracked to New York.
- 391 Kate Scott, the Decoy Detective.
- 408 Doc Grip, the Vendetta of Death.
- 419 The Bat of the Battery; or, Joe Phenix, Detective.
- 423 The Lone Hand; or, The Red River Recreants.
- 440 The High Horse of the Pacific.
- 461 The Fresh on the Rio Grande.
- 465 The Actor Detective.

LATEST AND NEW ISSUES.

- 467 Mainwaring, the Salamander. By Jackson Knox.
- 468 Coldgrip in Deadwood. By Capt. Howard Holmes.
- 469 The Lieutenant Detective. By Col. P. Ingraham.
- 470 The Duke of Dakota. By Wm. H. Manning.
- 471 The Heart of Oak Detective. By E. A. St. Mox.
- 472 Six Foot Si; or, The Man to "Tie To." By P. S. Warne.
- 473 Gilbert of Gotham, the Steel-arm Detective. By J. C. Cowdrick.
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- 477 Dead-arm Brandt. By Jackson Knox. Ready December 14.
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